

A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION COMPETENCY MODELS UTILIZING AN  
ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

BY

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A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION COMPETENCY MODELS UTILIZING AN  
ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

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## **A Case Study of Higher Education Competency Models Utilizing an Assessment Framework**

### ***Abstract***

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the creation and implementation of competency models in higher education masters level preparation programs. The study answers five research questions. Why and how did two higher education preparation programs create a professional competency model for the graduate students in the program and what are the characteristics of those competency models? What outcomes and assessment measures have been identified? How have faculty members and graduate assistantship supervisors created intentional experiences that lead to the identified outcomes? How have assessment results been used to improve learning? How do stakeholders perceive the competency model and its effectiveness? Through case studies of two student affairs preparation programs at Colorado State University and Bowling Green State University, which have already created and implemented competency models for their master's level graduate students, I provide guidance and direction for other preparation programs that are hoping to implement models in the future or programs that are hoping to revise their models to better meet students. The case studies included document analysis and interviews with faculty members, graduate assistantship supervisors, and graduate students. I drew five major conclusions from the study. Several factors influenced the adoption of the competency model, but the decision-making process for selecting specific competencies for the model cannot be explained by a theoretical framework. Competency models are more alike than different despite not being exactly the same. Structure and accountability are important for the students in order for them to be successful with the model. A connected social environment is important. Competency model results are not being used, and should.

### *Acknowledgements*

I want to first and foremost thank my family members. They have been a great source of support for me throughout this whole process. Most importantly, Beth, my wife, has been my champion, my challenger, and my shoulder to lean on. I want to thank my advisor, Lisa. She has been a great coach and mentor, while providing me the constructive criticism and direction I needed. I want to express my appreciation to my respondents and contacts at both Bowling Green State University and Colorado State University who provided me with the information necessary to complete my research. I also want to thank my current and past supervisors and colleagues who have provided me the physical and mental time to focus on the research and writing. Completing a dissertation while working full-time would not have been possible without a supportive and understanding place of employment.

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## **Chapter One**

### ***Introduction***

In the summer of 2007, a meeting was held involving supervisors of higher education graduate interns and the faculty within the Higher Education Program at the University of Kansas. The goal was to increase communication between the academic program and the internship sites. As a result of this meeting, a committee was formed to examine the competencies that higher education interns should acquire. I was asked to serve as the chair for this committee. The committee's charge was to develop a competency model that could embody all of the diverse internships available for the students in the program. At the time, there was not a master document of competencies for the profession like ACPA/NASPA produced in 2010. The competency model at the University of Kansas was to have three basic purposes. First, it could hopefully bring some uniformity to every intern's experience. This could increase accountability to the internship sites making sure that the sites and the graduate intern supervisors provided meaningful experiences for the interns. Second, it would also enable the higher education program to identify the competencies that graduates of the program would be able to acquire. This could be a great recruitment tool for the program. Finally, it would be a great resource to aid and assist in the personal and professional development of the intern.

The committee met biweekly for a year to put together the competency model that is now utilized. Research was gathered from several organizations and institutions. A focus group of interns was used to refine the final draft of the competencies. The competency model consisted of six competencies that each intern should be able to develop and achieve within the internship. These competencies were personal and professional development, multicultural competence, communication, educational skills, programming, and administration and organization

management. The competency tool was created in order to assess the competency range of each intern and then aid them in identifying experiences to develop those competencies. The competency model was implemented for fall 2008 for both first year and second year graduate students in the higher education program.

My work with this committee was the impetus for my dissertation topic. Throughout my experiences on the committee, I questioned the methods of creating the competency model, the potential effectiveness of it, and the overall experiences of the graduate interns at the University of Kansas. I began to wonder if and how other higher education programs were implementing and using competency models. I believe my research to be very timely for the profession of student affairs. When I first chaired the committee at the University of Kansas, and even when I first started researching for my dissertation topic, not a lot had been done at the national level. The ACPA/NASPA list of competencies was introduced in 2010 and even one of my case study sites decided to change from their own list of competencies to the ACPA/NASPA list the year prior to my study. I hope my research leads to a better understanding of competency-based education in higher education programs for myself and for others as it is an important and hot topic for the field

### ***Competencies in Higher Education***

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education defines a competency as “the combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task” (Jones & Voorhees, 2002; p. 12). Both Alverno College and Western Governors University (WGU) are long known for their efforts to reform general education around outcomes similar to competencies (Voorhees, 2001; Voorhees, 2001). The core of competency-based curriculum design at Alverno and WGU is to “ensure that learners will be

able to demonstrate their learned capabilities after they have acquired a necessary combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Competencies-based initiatives are growing in popularity in all of higher education, and that growth is seeping into student affairs preparation programs (Chyung, Stepich, & Cox, 2006; Voorhees, 2001; Jones & Voorhees; Kuk & Banning, 2009). However, it is important that I separate competency-based education from the competency models discussed in this study and utilized at the two case study sites. Competency-based education is a more comprehensive curriculum design than a competency model. Competency-based education includes identification of competencies, changes in delivery systems and pedagogy, and true assessment of those specific competencies. The competency models described in this study serve as a guide for student learning, reflection, and professional journey. The programs in this study have a competency model, but utilize traditional delivery methods and both indirect and direct measures of the competencies. According to Chyung, Stepich, and Cox (2006), the clear identification of competency-based education is the use of “criterion-referenced, measurable assessment methods” to determine if a student acquired a specific competency (p. 309).

This is not to say that the competency models implemented in the case study sites do not advance the learning and development of the graduate students. Competencies help the learner and faculty identify the intended and actual outcomes of a learning experience. Kuk and Banning (2009) state that a well-designed competency model “integrates outcome assessment throughout the design and implementation of the curricular and educational process” (p. 492). Competencies not only identify outcomes, though; they also provide students with a clear map and the tools to reach it (Voorhees; Chyung, Stepich, & Cox; Kuk & Banning). Little has been done to research and understand competency models in student affairs preparation programs.



Masters level graduate preparation programs in student personnel exist in order to prepare individuals for careers in student affairs and higher education administration. These programs provide knowledge, research, and experiences in order to assist students in their acquisition of the necessary competencies to be successful student affairs professionals. The ACPA Directory (2010) currently lists over 150 preparation programs in student affairs that meet specific guidelines: employs at least one full-time faculty member, contains at least four content courses about student affairs and the college student, is at least two academic years in duration, and has at least one practicum opportunity for students. Different programs at different institutions have different core emphases and different curricula; however, the overall goal of preparing student personnel professionals is the same (Badders, 1998; Hyman 1988; Keim, 1991; Meabon & Owens, 1984; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Waple, 2006). Opinions may also differ in what competencies are necessary for the professionals in the field of student personnel and what competencies are actually acquired during graduate programs. Hyman identified 33 entry level competencies from a literature review, while Herdlein (2004) used 12 knowledge/skill areas and 6 learning outcomes in his study on the relevance of graduate preparation programs. In recent years, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, or CACREP, (2001) the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, or CAS, (2003) and the Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs, or CAHEP, (2009) have attempted to standardize the experience of students in these programs. In 2010, NASPA and ACPA also created a list of competencies necessary for all levels of student personnel professionals.

For ease in discussion within this particular study, certain common key phrases will be used. *Student affairs* will refer to the field of student affairs, student personnel, and/or student

services. *Higher education* will be utilized as a term interchangeable with student affairs. *Competencies* will be defined as a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task. Finally, *preparation programs* will specifically refer to master's degree graduate programs in student affairs. The decision to choose select phrases merely eases and facilitates discussion and comprehension of the topic; this study does not examine the effectiveness of a chosen phrase over other possible choices. These definitions and other important key terms are included in Appendix A.

### ***Purpose of Study***

The purpose of this study is to explore the creation and utilization of competency models in higher education masters level preparation programs, to understand what outcomes and assessment measures have been identified in competency models, to discover how faculty members, graduate students, and graduate assistantship supervisor perceive the competency models and their effectiveness, to look at the experiences that programs provide for graduate students to help them develop the competencies, and to understand how assessment measures have been used to assess learning. Through case studies of two student affairs preparation programs that have already created and implemented competency models for their master's level graduate students, this study provides guidance and direction for other preparation programs that are hoping to implement models in the future or programs that are hoping to revise their models to better meet student needs. Through document analysis and interviews of faculty members, graduate assistantship supervisors, and graduate students of two selected preparation programs, I offer descriptive insight into the implementation process of a competency model and what influenced individual decisions about the competency models.

The study aims to answer five research questions.

1. Why and how did two higher education preparation programs create a professional competency model for the graduate students in the program?
2. What are the characteristics of those competency models? What outcomes and assessment measures have been identified?
3. How have faculty members and graduate assistantship supervisors created intentional experiences that lead to the identified outcomes?
4. How have assessment results been used to improve learning?
5. How do stakeholders perceive the competency model and its effectiveness?

This study is important because of the lack of consensus of the competencies necessary for student affairs professionals. Kretovics (2002) states that the literature on competencies “reveals no consensus about core competencies for student affairs practitioners” (p. 913). Kuk and Banning (2009) also cite that there is little research regarding competencies or outcomes assessment related to student affairs preparation programs. Though this study will not create consensus, it will provide a descriptive look at how two student affairs preparation programs create and utilize competency models to assist in the education and development of graduate students. NCES emphasizes the importance of ensuring that competencies are both valid and reliable, as well as ensuring that competencies are utilitarian and uniform across contexts and audiences (Jones & Voorhees, 2002).

There are several limitations to the existing research that affect the ability to generalize results to the greater population and that are an impetus for further research. First, there is a lack of sound research studies on the topic of competencies in student affairs in peer-reviewed journals. Second, there is a breadth of literature about assessment, but no research about the assessment of competency models in the field of student affairs. Finally, much of the existing

research is out-dated. Many of the studies used within this review were completed outside the last ten years. Higher education preparation programs are responsible for providing quality educational experiences that will prepare graduates for work in the field of student personnel (CAHEP, 2009; Herdlein, 2004). Establishing learning outcomes and competencies is necessary in order to provide expectations for those quality educational experiences. Critics of these preparation programs have concerns that programs provide insufficient education and inadequate training in the necessary competencies (Beatty, 1990). Challenges of accountability and respectability have been present for programs since the inception of the field according to Beatty.

Despite these problems of uniformity and accountability, the student affairs field looks to masters level preparation programs to develop young professionals for future careers in student personnel. Programs are seeing the need to establish learning outcomes and/or competency models for their students in order to better prepare them for their entry-level work. The literature is not clear whether specific competencies are developed through practical experiences and if others are developed through coursework. One could assume that both the in-class and out-of-class experiences are important in order to develop the whole professional, but finding distinctions might be difficult when it comes to assessment. Faculty members have more control over the coursework, while supervisors have more control over the out of class experiences. Regardless, research has pointed to the fact that faculty members and practitioners must collaborate more in order to aid graduate students in the acquisition of these competencies (Foster & Ward, 1996; Nash & Manning, 1996). All of the higher education preparation programs that I identified originally as possible case study sites require graduate students to have assistantships and to complete a certain number of practica credits to complement the academic coursework. The assistantships and practica will be explained more in detail in Chapter 2 of this

study. Faculty members, department leaders, graduate assistantship supervisors, and the graduate students are all stakeholders in the effort to improve the graduate experience through the use of competencies. This study provides insight into student affairs programs that have created and implemented competency models and how that experience affected the stakeholders. It can also be of benefit to potential and current graduate students of student affairs preparation programs who are hoping to learn more about competency models and the effect they can have on graduate students' development. By providing relevant research on competencies in higher education, graduate students can reflect on and plan their graduate program experiences in order to be more successful as professionals.

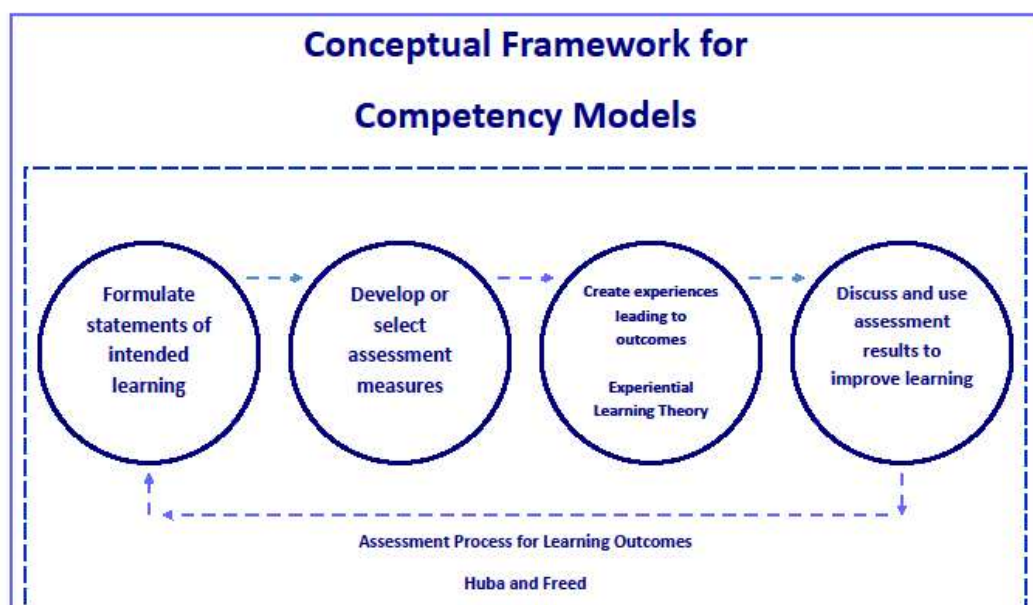
### ***Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework for this study will be a multi-faceted model utilizing two different theories. This model is depicted in Figure 1. The core of the framework is the learner-centered assessment model by Huba and Freed (1999). This framework provides a comprehensive depiction of the creation, implementation, utilization, and evaluation of competency models. One other theory is also important to the study. The Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1986) describes how experiences are created to develop specific competencies. This theory and the entire framework are explored in this section.

Huba and Freed (1999) support learner-centered assessment. They define assessment as “the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning” (p. 684). Huba and Freed identify four fundamental elements of learner-centered assessment. First is the formulation of the statements

of intended learning outcomes. Second is the development or selection of assessment measures. The creation of experiences leading to the outcomes is the next step. Finally, stakeholders must discuss and use the assessment results to improve learning. This last step leads back to the beginning of the model in case any changes or adaptations need to be made for the future.

**FIGURE 1 – Conceptual Framework**



The first element of learner-centered assessment is the identification of intended learning outcomes, or creation of the competency model. This describes the intentions about what the graduate students should know, understand, or be able to do upon graduation (Huba & Freed, 1999). Developing competencies and intended outcomes helps the student affairs preparation program be learner-centered. When this assessment takes place at the broad program level instead of the course level, it enables only the most important goals to be addressed, according to Huba and Freed. The first and second research questions for this study investigate this element. The programs have identified intended outcomes, or competencies, which are focused on what the learner should develop, or acquire through the experience.

The second step of the assessment process is designing or selecting the assessment measures that will identify whether the learning outcomes, or competencies, have been achieved. Competencies can be evaluated through both direct and indirect measures (Huba & Freed, 1999). Direct measures include projects, portfolios, observations of skills, and written and oral exams. Indirect measures include self-reports by the graduate students or shared perceptions of supervisors or future employers. To provide the most accurate and useful assessment of outcomes, both direct and indirect measures should be used according to Huba and Freed. This study investigates both the types of measures that student affairs preparation programs might be using to assess the competencies. I analyze direct measures through document analysis of any projects, written assessments, and student portfolios. Direct measures include anything that enables me to identify what competencies are being addressed and/or developed. Indirect assessment will be formed through interviews with students, faculty members, and graduate assistantship supervisors.

Providing experiences for students to develop their competencies is the third element of the assessment process (Huba & Freed, 1999). For the purpose of this study, Dewey's Theory on Experiential Learning (1986) is used to explain this element. The experiential learning theory applies directly to the development of competencies. It is through practical experiences and hands-on learning that graduate students in higher education preparation programs get the chance to develop the competencies that they must acquire to be successful in their future careers (Dewey). Though Dewey's initial theory focused mostly on experiences in elementary and secondary classrooms, it is applied here to the core experiences that graduate students receive out of the classroom. The graduate assistantship supervisor can act as the guide or leader of a graduate student's practical experiences in providing opportunities to further develop

competencies. The supervisor can help the graduate student identify strengths and challenges, while also making time for opportunities to properly reflect on learning experiences. The components are explained further in later in this chapter.

Huba and Freed (1999) state that student's learning is affected by the way experiences are organized, sequenced, and connected. The experiences might also be built to address all the competencies that are identified. As the competency model is created, the program could "include activities and experiences that will help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and understand that each of our learning outcomes requires" (Huba and Freed, p. 688). This study examines the experiences within the graduate program that are designed by supervisors or faculty member to develop competencies, as well as how identified competencies and the desired outcomes are communicated to students and their supervisors.

Finally, stakeholders can discuss and use assessment results to improve learning. Faculty members, assistantship supervisors, and graduate students can utilize results in order to build experiences, make necessary changes, and improve overall student performance (Huba and Freed, 1999). This study examines how all three groups of stakeholders do or do not use the competencies models to reflect on experiences and make future plans. With the assessment results, the stakeholders can adapt the model, competencies, assessment measures, and experiences as necessary. Discussions might not only be happening in individual settings, but also in larger group settings in order to evaluate and adapt the overall model and its effectiveness.

This overall conceptual framework is considered in full to assess the creation, implementation and use of competency models. Learner-centered assessment supports the attributes of a quality education (Huba & Freed, 1999). It "synthesizes experiences, fosters



ongoing practice of learned skills, and integrates education and experience” (Huba & Freed, p. 694). The constant discussion and evaluation at multiple stages of competency development enhance the overall learning experience. Moreover, focusing on learning outcomes within specific academic programs communicates the importance of certain skills when evaluating professional competence” (Aloi, 2003). That means that the identified competencies can focus on skills and abilities central to the discipline of higher education and based on professional standards of excellence (Huba & Freed, 2000).

### ***Experiential Learning Theory***

The Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1986) corresponds to the third step of the Huba and Freed’s assessment model (1999). The Experiential Learning Theory is specifically used to describe the learning experiences of students. As mentioned earlier, Dewey’s theory originally was applied to students in early education. However, the overall purpose of the theory is still relevant for students in higher education. The theory is based on the idea that the responsibility of educating students involves the entire social environment of the educational system, and not just the faculty member. Knowledge and skills are learned through quality experiences that must be created for the student.

I have identified five components of Dewey’s (1986) Experiential Learning Theory as being important for the purposes of this study. These components are practical experiences, social environment, connection of experiences, active participation, and reflection. A summary of the concepts of the Experiential Learning Theory that are important for this study are located in Figure 2. This study focuses on out-of-the-classroom experiences that are generally provided through assistantships and practica established in higher education programs. Graduate assistantship supervisors are often the most influential figures for Masters level graduate students

(Saltmarsh, 2008). I am interested in how the supervisor-graduate assistant relationship influences the success of competency development. Saltmarsh holds that the supervisor can provide the graduate student opportunities to solve complex problems and can address real-life situations that will enhance their knowledge and learning according to the experiential learning theory. Graduate students could spend 20 or 30 hours of their week within their assistantships and their supervisor will likely influence the quality of the assistantship experience they receive. Supervisors can assist their graduate students to develop and acquire the necessary competencies by providing practical experiences in their assistantships. Hands-on learning will enhance comprehension of and engagement in the subject matter (Dewey, 1986; Foster & Ward, 1996). The question is how does the supervisor provide effective learning experiences for the graduate students in order for them to apply what they learn in classrooms to what they are doing in their internship? This will be asked of the supervisors that are interviewed.

I am also interested in how faculty members might influence what experiences occur through assistantships and practica. What do faculty members require of graduate students and what classroom exercises occur to enhance competency development? In the theory on experiential learning, “the teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator, but takes on that of leader of group activities” (Roberts, 2003, p. 5). Dewey (1986) criticized traditional educational approaches for not engaging students and for not addressing the different learning styles of students. Instead, he encourages teachers to be responsible for both subject matter and individual learners. How do faculty members determine what the appropriate learning experiences are for students to produce desired learning outcomes? I hope to find this out through the study and learn how the faculty attempts to enhance the competency model and its effectiveness.

“Experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another” (Dewey, 1986, p. 247). The experiential learning theory is based on the fact that learning is maximized when experiences are connected for students. How are higher education programs constructed both in the classroom and outside the classroom in order for graduate students to use the theory and learning in one experience in order to make better decisions in future experiences (Dewey)? Knowledge creation for graduate students is a two-way process as they ideally are both consumers and producers (Saltmarsh, 2008). How do educators and supervisors challenge the students to be active participants in their own experiential learning process? The assumption is that the competency models that are addressed in this study are more effective if the graduate student is self-oriented. Interviews with faculty and supervisors might reveal whether this assumption is true. Dewey believed that education is more effective when the learner is ready and when he or she has the desire to learn more (Stuckart & Glanz, 2007). In this theory, a graduate student who wants to develop competencies is going to be a lot more successful than one who is indifferent or apathetic to the concept. When and how are experiences connected for graduate students? All influences will be addressed in the study and how those influences play in a role in the graduate students overall effectiveness.

The final concept to point out about the experiential learning theory is the importance of reflection (Stuckard & Ganz, 2007; Carpenter, Patitu, Cuyjet, 1999). Much like the need for experiences to be connected for students, Dewey (1986) believed that it is crucial for students to be engaged in some sort of reflection about their experiences. Faculty members and supervisors might have the responsibility of holding their graduate students accountable for this reflection whether it is through papers, portfolios, discussions, or journaling. Examples of reflection

exercises are included as part of the document analysis. Reflection allows the graduate student to create knowledge and apply that knowledge to future experiences. This opportunity for metacognition advances analytical skills and helps the graduate student understand how to further develop their competencies through further experiences (Stuckard & Ganz). [Learning] develops best “as a result of reflective, strategic, real-world problem-solving action and experience” (Saltmarsh, 2008, p. 63). I asked all stakeholders if and how reflection was occurring as an organized and/or informal activity. Dewey’s theory raises several questions for the researcher that tie back to the original research questions for the study. I agree with some of the assumptions and suggestions that Dewey holds in regards to effective experiential learning. These assumptions and suggestions provide a model for which I compare and contrast what is actually happening for graduate students in higher education preparation programs.

**FIGURE 2 – Summary of Components of Dewey’s Experiential Learning Theory. These components have been identified by the researcher as areas to research when studying competency models.**

<u><b>Component</b></u>	<u><b>Importance</b></u>
Practical Experiences	<i>Students should learn through hands-on experiences and real-life opportunities in assistantships, practica, and other out-of-class experiences.</i>
Social Environment	<i>All faculty and administrators must take responsibility for creating an educational environment that enhances quality experiences and encourages engagement and individual learning styles.</i>
Connection of Experiences	<i>Students must be able to connect all experiences - both through coursework and through practical experiences - in order to learn from new experiences and to understand the bigger picture.</i>
Active Participation	<i>Students must be actively engaged in their own education and competency development and take the initiative to seek out experiences that will help them grow and develop.</i>
Reflection	<i>Reflection helps student in their knowledge construction, as well as assisting them as they process through learning experiences and their own development.</i>

### ***Significance***

I believe this study is very important as there has been very little research involving how effective competencies models are and if they are meeting the desired outcome. The desired outcome is also not uniform across programs. This study does not create uniformity, but it does provide necessary research into the creation, implementation, and utilization of competency models. Outcomes assessment is very important if programs are going to ensure that graduates have obtained the necessary competencies. This study provides a comprehensive description of programs using competency models in order to educate all stakeholders: faculty, graduate assistant supervisors, graduate students, and future employers.

### ***Conclusion***

This multi-theory conceptual framework is applied to the study of all aspects of the creation, implementation, and maintenance of a competency model for a higher education master's level graduate program. Huba and Freed's Assessment Model (1999) is the core of the framework, while Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory (1986) is an integral piece and part of the third step in the assessment model. The framework provides the general basis for how I direct the study and provides direct influence on what questions are asked of interviewees and focus group participants. In Chapter Two, I provide literature and past research regarding competencies in higher education, as well as the practical experiences provided in graduate school.

## **Chapter 2**

### ***Literature Review***

The processes of creating and implementing competency models in higher education are

not discussed in literature, but the wide differences in competency models support the need for this study. In this literature review, I first discuss competency-based initiatives in general education. Second, I discuss past studies regarding competencies specifically in student affairs preparation programs. Third, the identification and establishment of necessary student affairs competencies by professional organizations is covered. Next, I analyze the differences in the literature between the competencies that are important and the competencies that are actually acquired. Finally, the experiences and opportunities commonly utilized by student affairs graduate preparation programs to develop competencies are discussed.

### ***Competency-Based Initiatives in General Education***

Interest in the skills needed for employment in the United States increased with the establishment of the National Skills Standards Board of the United States in 2000 (R. Voorhees, 2001). Competency-initiatives have also accelerated recently in other locations like Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and many other European nations (R. Voorhees). Even though Alverno College and Western Governors University are probably the institutions most widely-known for their competency-based education, Kings College and Northwest Missouri State University are also well-known institutions utilizing competency-based education (R. Voorhees; A. Voorhees, 2001).

Alverno College (2012) defines its curriculum based on the abilities that students will need to be effective after they graduate. In its mission, Alverno says that “the curriculum is ability-based and is focused on student outcomes integrated in a liberal arts approach” (p. 1). Students complete a core curriculum plus courses for their selected major and minor, but also develop the eight abilities that Alverno has identified are important for all graduates. These abilities are communication, analysis, problem solving, valuing, social interaction, developing a

global perspective, effective citizenship, aesthetic engagement.

Degrees at Western Governors University are defined not by courses taken within a particular area of study or major requirements, but instead by categories of competencies organized by domains (Voorhees, 2001). The domains may serve one degree or several degrees at once. Students work with faculty and mentors to develop learning plans to a development of the competencies under the domains developed for the desired certificate or degree. The WGU website (2012) markets to students that their focus is “not on class attendance,” but rather on ensuring that graduate possess skills and knowledge necessary for success.

### ***Competencies in Student Affairs Preparation Programs***

Hyman (1988) identifies 33 entry level student affairs competencies and places them into the five broad categories of goal-setting, consultation, communication, assessment and evaluation, and environmental and organizational management. Most other models in the literature differ in structure and content. Kuk, Cobb, and Forrest (2007) identify four overarching competency factors: individual practice and administrative skills, professional knowledge content, goal setting and the ability to deal with change, and managing organizations and groups. Likewise, Beatty and Stamatakos (1990) developed six general competency areas for higher education that could hold all specific competencies within: theoretical competence, scholarly competence, functional competence, transferral competence, environmental competence, and human relations competence. Herdlein (2004) uses 12 knowledge/skill areas and six learning outcomes, including complex cognitive skills, knowledge acquisition, interpersonal development, intrapersonal development, practical competence, and civic responsibility, while Waple (2006) uses 28 selected skills in his study.

The research of Ostroth (1975) is often cited in the literature reviews of other relevant

studies. Ostroth assesses the importance of 18 specific courses and five general areas of study for higher education: counseling, administration and management, higher education, social and cultural foundation, research and evaluation. Reardon, Lumsden, and Meyer (2005) found employers identified eight general, transferable skills: communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, life management, social responsibility, teamwork, and technical/scientific skills. Finally, the Tomorrow's Higher Education (T.H.E.) model was commissioned by the American College Personnel Association and stresses the combination of six necessary competencies: goal setting, assessment, instruction, consultation, management, and evaluation (Hyman, 1988; Waple, 2006).

With all of the discrepancies in the research in regards to competencies in the field of higher education, one should address the commonalities. Student development theory, leadership, research and assessment, communication skills, counseling, and administration and management are all areas of competencies that are identified in at least three studies as being important to student affairs practice (Herdlein, 2004; Hyman, 1988; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Ostroth; Waple, 2006). However, the ranking of these competencies compared to other competencies listed differed in importance within each study. It is also important to note that not even these common competencies could be agreed upon across literature. I have created a table (Figure 3) to help readers understand the frequency use of competencies in literature and studies. The first column in the table identifies the specific competency. The second column lists the sources that distinguish the specific competency for use in their study. These competencies listed within Figure 3 are defined specifically in Appendix A. This summary of the literature as well as the work of relevant professional organizations is important to consider as I look at the competency models of the two case study sites. I am interested in comparing the competencies



that have been identified by the two programs and the competencies listed in the chart.

**FIGURE 3 – Competencies identified frequently in literature.**

<b><u>COMPETENCY</u></b>	<b><u>SOURCE</u></b>
Assessment, Research, & Evaluation	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; Ostroth, 1975; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Communication Skills Written and/or Verbal	Ostroth, 1975; CAS 2003; Burkard et al., 2005; Beatty, 1990; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Budgeting and Finance	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Human Resource Management	Beatty, 1990; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Counseling	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Newton, 1976; Ostroth, 1975; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004
Administrative/Management Skills	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Newton, 1976; Hyman, 1985; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000;
Leadership Skills/Development	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Computer Skills/Technology	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Newton, 1976; CAHEP, 2009; Herdlein, 2004; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Organization Behavior and Develop	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Legal Issues	Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CACREP, 2001; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Program Development and Evaluation	Beatty, 1990; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CACREP, 2001; CAS, 2003; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Interpersonal Relations	Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007;
Time Management	Burkard et al., 2005; Newton, 1976; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007;
Problem-solving/Decision-making	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006;

Teamwork/Collaboration	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; Herdlein, 2004; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Advising Skills	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Supervision Skills	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Crisis Intervention	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Conflict resolution/mediation	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; Herdlein, 2004; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Multicultural competence/Ability to work with a Diverse Population/Inclusivity/Equity	Burkard et al., 2005; Newton, 1976; Hyman, 1985; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Ethical Behavior	Burkard et al., 2005; CAHEP, 2009; CACREP, 2001; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010
Vision	Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; CACREP, 2001; CAHEP, 2009; ACPA/NASPA, 2010

### ***Professional Organizations***

This section of the literature review looks specifically at the competencies identified as important by several different professional organizations. I am specifically interested in investigating if and how the work of these organizations has influenced the creation and implementation of the competency models at the case study sites.

After several efforts from various organizations to produce standards in the area of competencies, the work of two organizations emerged: the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, or CAS, and the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Other Related Educational Programs, or CACREP. Both organizations reflect the influence of the Association of College Personnel Administrators (ACPA) in their attempt to create graduate standards in order to provide criteria for academic programs to judge their effectiveness (CAS, 2003). The standards created by CAS (2003) address all aspects of the preparation programs

including recruitment and admissions, pedagogy, program evaluation, and equity and access. CAS includes a list of areas in which students must demonstrate competence including student development theory, organization and administration, counseling, and assessment, evaluation, and research. CAS also emphasizes the need for history and philosophical foundations of higher education and student characteristics and effects of college on students. Assistantships are a required standard for students, as well as practica. Interestingly, CAS does not specifically describe what competencies can be developed through practical experiences versus through the formal curriculum.

CACREP (2001) developed standards for all counseling and related educational programs. These standards include professional identity, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, helping relationships, group work, assessment, and research and program evaluation. It specifically addresses the need for graduates in student affairs programs to demonstrate the necessary knowledge and skills in the areas of foundations for student affairs, contextual dimensions, and knowledge and skill requirements for professionals. Though many of these core areas are broader in title, CACREP also has some common competency categories found in other literature in which CACREP emphasizes a need for graduate students to acquire. These common competencies include research, assessment, and program evaluation, counseling, legal issues, multicultural competence, student development, and leadership. Similar to CAS (2003), CACREP also has several other areas that are not listed throughout the literature, which include historical foundations, characteristics of students, impact of college environments, and supervision.

Recently, the Ad Hoc Committee on Guidelines and Standards of the Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs, or CAHEP, produced a set of self-assessment

guidelines for preparation programs (CAHEP, 2009). This report sets up proposed program guidelines and standards in three broad domains: the program domain, the content domain, and the performance domain. The program domain addresses general program operations and includes the mission and vision, structure, faculty members, department leadership, program culture, credit requirements, and program assessment. The content domain addresses issues of curriculum and content. CAHEP recommends 11 topics that could be included as core content, but does not limit programs to only those 11 topics. The content domain also addresses the need for a capstone experience. The performance domain refers to the knowledge and skills (competencies) that students should be able to demonstrate as graduates. CAHEP recommends 15 competencies: assessment and evaluation, finance and budget, communication skills, decision making and problem solving, ethical behavior, inclusivity, interpersonal skills, leadership, leadership development, management, resilience, project management, teaming, technological competence, and vision. It is important to note that most of the competencies presented in the CACREP (2001) and CAS (2003) standards are related to the academic curriculum. CAHEP, on the other hand, lists a performance domain including competencies that would be developed through practical experiences.

The two organizations that represent and guide the student personnel profession, the American College Personnel Association, or ACPA and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, or NASPA, have also worked together to create a list of outcomes that define the skills, knowledge, and competencies that all professionals in the field should be able to demonstrate. This list of professional competency areas attempts to embody all outcomes, regardless of the professional specialization and level of experience (ACPA/NASPA, 2010). The list is designed to assist professionals as they seek out experiences and opportunities that will

allow them to grow in their professional development. The broad areas that have been identified are advising and helping, assessment, research, and evaluation, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ethical professional practice, history, philosophy, and values, human and organizational resources, law, policy, and governance, leadership, personal foundations, and student learning and development. It is important to keep the work of all of these professional organizations in mind as one attempts to understand the external influences that affect the creation, implementation, and utilization of competency models. I believe that it is also beneficial to point out that the document that ACPA/NASPA created in 2010 is a list of competencies with a bulleted action items under each competency. This was designed to help individuals evaluate their level of proficiency within each competency. In my definition and for the purposes of this study, that document is a list; it is not a competency model. A competency model includes not only the competencies, but also the intentional experiences and the entire assessment process.

### ***Discrepancies between Importance and Attainment of Competencies***

When addressing the necessary competencies, research often addresses the differences between the importance of those competency goals for practice and the actual attainment of those competency outcomes by graduate students. Sometimes graduates of student personnel preparation programs “experience a conflict between what they have learned in graduate school and what they encounter in the field” (Kinser, 1993, p. 4). The studies of Herdlein (2004), Hyman (1988), and Waple (2006) all look at these discrepancies between attainment of competencies in graduate school and the use of competencies in entry-level positions. Herdlein found that chief student affairs officers believe legal knowledge, strategic planning, finance and budgeting, campus politics, assessment and research, and proficient writing skills are all important to practice in the field. However, the chief student affairs officers in Herdlein’s study

did not rate graduate students as very high in these competencies. Management, legal issues, and budgeting are also mentioned in Sandeen (1982) as competencies that students needed to learn more about.

Hyman's study (1998) addresses the differences in possession and importance of competencies as perceived by faculty members, directors of housing, and chief student affairs officers. Hyman identifies significant differences between faculty members and the two practitioner groups in the perception of the graduates' acquisition of the competencies in all five categories addressed in the research. Despite all three respondent groups agreeing on the importance of the competencies, faculty members perceived that the graduate students attained these competencies at a higher level than the practitioners perceived the graduate students did.

In the 28 skills that Waple (2006) looks at, he finds congruence between the degree of attainment and the degree of use in 16 of those skills. Four skills (supervision of staff, strategic planning, budgeting and fiscal management, and use of microcomputers) were attained at a low degree despite being used at a high degree for over 20 percent of the respondents. Both strategic planning and budgeting and fiscal management were listed in Herdlein's research (2004) in regards to discrepancies. On another note, Waple also finds that three skills (history of student affairs, history of higher education, and research methods) were attained a high degree despite being reported as used at a low rate by entry-level professionals. It is important to consider, as the research shows, that there are some competencies that need to be addressed.

I hope to discover how my research results compares to this literature on discrepancies between attainment versus importance of competencies. I am interested in competencies are easiest to develop or attain, and which ones are the most difficult. The study also is designed to understand how the model and/or experiences are adapted based on the outcomes. This is the

fourth step of the conceptual framework (Huba & Freed, 1999).

### ***Development of Competencies Through Experiences***

This section of the literature review discusses how and what experiences are created in order to advance student learning and the development of competencies. The two main components to the graduates' education in preparation programs are the coursework and the practical experience. Both are valuable parts of the experience and both have many nuances that are important to consider given the experiential learning theory that has been discussed earlier. Frequently, the knowledge gained through coursework must be applied in practical experiences to be fully understood and appreciated. A big part of the implementation and utilization of the competency model is the development of experiences. The experiential learning theory is used to explain how practical experiences are used to develop competencies. The identified components of Dewey's theory (1986) are again practical experiences, social environment, connection of experiences, active participation, and reflection. This section covers the perceptions of experiential learning and discusses the most prevalent avenues for graduate students in higher education programs to obtain those practical experiences: assistantship, practica, and volunteer experiences.

In Forney (1994), 65 percent of respondents in graduate preparation programs believed that their experiential learning was more valuable to their professional preparation than academic learning and 35 percent desired more experiential emphases and less time in the classroom. Furthermore, 53 percent of the respondents in Forney's study believed that they learned more from practitioners than from faculty members. "Perhaps some of this information cannot really be taught; it must be experienced to be learned" (Kinser, 1993, p. 13). That is not to say that nothing is learned or attained in the classroom, because much of the knowledge base and theory

are acquired through coursework. Competencies such as communication skills, assessment, research, and legal issues can be developed through proper class requirements and coursework. It is through the experiential education that graduate students are able to take advantage of opportunities to acquire and test their competencies and to complement their academic work (Sandeem, 1982; Pitts & Benacci, 1992).

Involvement in activities other than coursework and papers can only enhance the learning experience (Gansemer-Topf, Ewing, & Johnson, 2006). Assistantships and internships were terms used simultaneously in research, though they described the same experience. Assistantships involve full-time service under a qualified professional supervisor in a job that is different than the students' regular employment (Foster & Ward, 1996). An effective assistantship "teaches the practical, judgmental, and situated intellectual work that characterizes traditional crafts and occupations with the reflective and elaborative mechanisms that characterize higher-order thinking" (Shulman, 1998, p. 524). Assistantships give students a chance to be mentored by a supervisor and professional in the field, while they complete professional work and responsibilities. They are able to take an active part in their learning and professional preparation.

Besides assistantships, practica were another component identified in the field of higher education as the "primary means for training and for later career decision making" (Richmond & Sherman, 1991, p. 16). The practica experiences, or for-credit field experiences, are characterized by coursework or activities that focus on applying conceptual or practical skills in a selected department (Foster & Ward, 1996). It is important to supplement these experiences with guided reflection or regular meetings with an advisor or faculty member, as "experience without reflection is incomplete" (Carpenter et al., 1999, p. 3). Foster and Ward agreed with



Carpenter et al. that practica and assistantships should be a reflective experience.

92 percent of the programs in the study done by Foster and Ward (1996) offered practica and the number, type, and amount of student participating all differed greatly. The research by Forney (1994) found that students favor the experiential learning component over traditional classroom time. These experiences can enable the graduate student to attain the necessary competencies, which they might not be acquiring in their assistantships, while also gaining valuable knowledge about a diverse range of student services. Faculty and assistantship supervisors could also be encouraging the student to choose a practicum experience that will help them develop their set of skills, learning outcomes, and competencies, instead of an experience that simply seems interesting. I am interested in how intentional and unintentional decisions are made by stakeholders in order for specific students to develop specific competencies.

Graduate students are also encouraged to take part in other service and leadership positions in order to gain valuable experience in diverse areas, make new professional connections, and to see other areas in student personnel (Carpenter et al., 1999). This can happen on the campus level in volunteer positions and in formal graduate student organizations. Miller and Vacik (1996) found that half of their student personnel preparation program respondents reported offering a formal graduate student organization through their department or academic program. These student organizations offer activities such as brown bag lunches, career advancement activities, discussion groups, mentor-type relationship building, publications, seminars, lectures, and research support. Available service and leadership positions will also happen at the regional and national level. Graduate students can be encouraged to attend conferences, attend in-service training, and assume leadership positions in professional organizations (Richmond & Sherman, 1991). CAS (2003) also encourages students to take part

in special opportunities to enrich their learning experience beyond the formal curriculum, such as student affairs organizations, professional associations, and outreach projects. It is through these experiences that students might be able to improve on existing competencies and also build developing ones.

### ***Conclusion***

The literature covers differing competency models in higher education and experiences that student affairs graduate programs provide in order for graduate students to learn. However, there has not been much research on how competency models are created, implemented, and utilized to improve learning and the development of the necessary skills and knowledge for student affairs program graduates. Furthermore, the widespread disparity in competencies used in various competency models motivates me to find more information on how components of competency models have been selected, and how experiences are created in order for graduate students to acquire the identified competencies. This case study of two higher education preparation programs might be able to provide qualitative data that will answer these questions and the established research questions.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative case study of two masters level higher education preparation programs. As described and noted in the previous literature review, most, if not all, of the existing research on competencies involves quantitative methodology. I feel it is important to use qualitative data to have a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the faculty members, graduate students, and graduate assistantship supervisors who are affected by these competency models. For those who have been involved in the creation of the model, how have their opinions, values, and experiences helped them shape the competency model for the program? What do participants think about these competency models and how do they use them to shape the graduate students' experiences? How are the competency models implemented into programs and how are students held accountable to the models in place?

The case study approach faces scrutiny because of its limitations in generalizing to the wider population. I acknowledge these limitations, but provide a descriptive and informative piece that can educate others. I selected two preparation programs in order for readers to learn from the experiences of the programs presented and the participants interviewed. Given the research questions posed, this method is an appropriate approach because of the need for more in-depth responses from participants and the need for document analysis. The amount of time it takes to conduct site visits and interview subjects was considered. I believe that I provide rich data and better analysis because I focused my research efforts on just two institutions versus spending less time on several institutions.

### ***Participant Selection***

I used purposeful selection in acquiring the subjects in this study. The research utilizes case studies of two preparation programs in higher education. Both the NASPA Graduate Program Directory in Higher Education, Student Affairs, and Related Fields and the ACPA Directory of Graduate Programs Preparing Student Affairs Professionals list over 150 graduate preparation programs across the nation (ACPA, 2011; NASPA, 2011). I searched U.S. World and News Report to find programs that were ranked high, as well as identified programs that had a strong word-of-mouth reputation. After identifying 15 institutions, I searched the program websites to find if a competency model is being utilized. It was not feasible for me to research and identify what exact percentage of the graduate preparation programs utilize a competency model as no ready list is available. I contacted faculty representatives at a few schools with identified competency models. I contacted schools based on accessibility and previous knowledge. Several programs that I contacted declined my request to be part of my research. One example of a reason that my request was politely declined was the belief that the program's curriculum would not qualify as a competency model. Another program declined my request because they did not think that their newly-restructured program was ready to be the subject of a case study. In the end, the programs at Colorado State University and Bowling Green State University were chosen. Representatives at both of these institutions expressed the willingness to work with me and provide access to the individuals and documents necessary to complete my research. Both selected programs have also been identified as being accredited with the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, or CAS, (2003) and the ACPA Professional Preparation Commission Standards (ACPA, 2011). I believe that both programs have strong national reputations for the quality of their academic programs and the quality of the

graduates they put out in the field every year. Their reputation as exemplar programs makes it easier for me to provide results that others will want to review and use for their own programs.

The first site is Bowling Green State University. It is a research II institution located in Bowling Green, Ohio. The College Student Personnel (CSP) program there is a 45 credit hour program with about 80 full-time students enrolled. The CSP program currently utilizes the competency model adopted by ACPA and NASPA (2010). Students can develop these competencies through assistantships and other practical experiences. There are ten competency areas: advising and helping, assessment, evaluation, and research, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ethical professional practice, history, philosophy, and values, human and organizational resources, law, policy, and governance, leadership, personal foundations, and student learning and development. This competency list is included in Appendix B.

The second site is Colorado State University. It is a land-grant institution and Carnegie Research University in Fort Collins, Colorado. The Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) program there is a 45 credit hour program with about 40-50 full-time students enrolled. SAHE has established a set of professional competencies that students must develop during their graduate school experience. These competencies include nine knowledge competencies and five professional practice areas: administrative functions and processes, managing self, communication, working relationships with others, and mobilizing innovation and change. The list is included in Appendix C.

### ***Research Structure and Data Collection***

Several sources of data and modes of evidence were gathered to increase the validity of the study. I utilized documents pertaining to the creation of the competency model at the university. Documents include syllabi, official departmental forms, website materials, rubrics,

competency assessment tools, portfolios, and informational forms. An informed consent statement was signed by each subject. Through my informed consent statements, I gained permission to access individual portfolios of graduate students to review.

Interviews were conducted in person with identified individuals at each institution. Each interview lasted about one hour. Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder, and interviews were transcribed after the fact. Because all interviews were transcribed, I was able to quote sources exactly and increase the validity of the data. I took notes during each interview and completed a write-up of the interviews within one week of the site visit in order to create the most comprehensive summary. This also helped me with the analysis as I completed all of the transcription personally and it took several months to do so. Having the write-ups on the interviews completed while the interview was still fresh helped me recall important information and opinions later. All the data were collected within the interview time, but a few follow-up emails were used to request documents mentioned during interviews.

### ***Interview Participants***

At each case study site, I interviewed several participants. At Bowling Green State University, three faculty members and two supervisors were interviewed. I also conducted a focus group with three students. The students were in the summer between their first and second year of the program. At Colorado State University, four faculty members and three supervisors were interviewed. There were four students in that focus group. At CSU, I interviewed the students in September of their second year in the program. The department head at both sites helped me make contact with the interview subject volunteers and helped me set up facilities to conduct the interviews.

### ***Interview Questions***

The interview questions were chosen to answer the overall research questions.

The interview questions were, for the most part, exploratory in nature. I constructed a set of interview questions for each type of participant. These were the guiding questions and I asked more probing questions and/or unlisted questions when necessary. The initial set of questions for each participant is listed below, separated out under each research question.

**Why and how did two higher education preparation programs create a professional competency model for the graduate students in the program?**

**What are the characteristics of those competency models? What outcomes and assessment measures have been identified?**

*Faculty Members*

- How familiar are you with the competency model?
- What were the internal, organizational, and/or external influences that affected the creation of the model?
- What role do the accrediting agencies and/or professional organizations play into your use of the competency model?
- Describe your process for creating the competency model.
- How did certain people on the committee affect how the model was created?
- How did you derive your list of competencies? Did you use other existing models as a basis?

*Graduate Assistantship Supervisors*

- How familiar are you with the competency model?
- What do you envision your role being in the personal and professional development of the graduate student that you supervise?
- Why do you believe that competency model was created?

*Focus Group of Graduate Students*

- What role do you envision your practical experiences play in your overall graduate education?
- How familiar are you with the competency model?
- Why do you believe that competency model was created?
- In what ways are you exposed to the competency model? Passively? In classes? In your assistantship?

*Additional Questions for Individuals Who Helped Create the Competency Model*

- Describe your process for creating the competency model.
- How did you derive your list of competencies? Did you use other existing models as a basis?
- What internal, external, or organizational forces influenced your creation of a competency model?
- How did utilize the competency work from accreditation agencies or professional organizations?

- At the time of creation, how important was it to match other existing competency models?
- Upon reflection, how would you change the competency model in any way?
- Upon reflection, how would you change the creation process of the competency model?

### **How have assessment results been used to improve learning?**

*Faculty Members, Graduate Assistantship Supervisors, and Individuals Who Helped Create the Competency Model*

- How is the model evaluated on a continual basis? Has it ever been changed or adapted? How?
- How are results used to improve the learning?
- If you had the time and resources to do so, how else would you use the model?

### **How have faculty members and graduate assistantship supervisors created intentional experiences that lead to the identified outcomes?**

*Faculty Members, Graduate Assistantship Supervisors, and Individuals Who Helped Create the Competency Model*

- How do you believe the competency model has improved the knowledge and skill sets of the program graduates?
- How well do the competencies cover the necessary learning outcomes and skills for your graduate student?
- What procedures are in place to hold your graduate student accountable to the competencies? How do they work?

*Faculty Members*

- How do you help students connect all of their experiences? What connection is there between the internship, for-credit practica, and other experiences?
- How do you help students reflect on learning experiences?
- How do you assess what is learned or gained out of the for-credit practicum?
- What factors make the competency model and experiences successful for the student?
- How do you market or communicate to students what the competency model is and how to use it? Do you feel that you should be doing more, or something different in your communication?

*Graduate Assistantship Supervisors*

- How, if at all, has the competency model influenced the way you have designed the internship experience?
- How do you help students connect all of their experiences?
- How do you help students reflect on learning experiences?
- What factors in an assistantship make the competency model more effective?
- How does the competency model change your supervision style?

### **How do stakeholders perceive the competency model and its effectiveness?**

*Faculty Members, Graduate Assistantship Supervisors, and Graduate Students*

- How has the competency model enabled you to acquire more knowledge and skills?
- How well do the competencies cover the necessary learning outcomes and skills for a graduate in the field of higher education?



- What are the procedures in place to hold you accountable to the competencies?
- How have you used the competency model to design your overall experience in the program?
- Do you focus on the competencies more in the classroom, in your assistantship, or in your practica? How so?
- How does your assistantship compare to others in terms of providing experiences that enhance the development of competencies?
- What backgrounds, education, or personal characteristics of graduate students make it easier for that student to use the competency model to its fullest?
- How are you able to connect experiences and reflect on them? Who helps you do this and how?
- How do the actions or behaviors of your peers in terms of their work with the competency model influence your actions?
- How would you improve the model or the overall process of developing competencies?
- How would you say that your supervisor and/or your supervisor/supervisee relationship influence your ability to develop competencies using the model?

### ***Pilot Study***

I completed a pilot study in the spring of 2011. The pilot study included an interview of a faculty member, one graduate assistantship supervisor, and two current masters level graduate students. All four of these participants were enrolled at or employed at the University of Kansas at the time of the study. The pilot study helped me in three ways. First, I was able to improve and refine my specific interview questions. I found that some of the interview questions needed to be reworded and reordered, and there were more interview questions that needed to be added. Second, I realized that some document analysis should occur prior to making campus visits. Being able to see and understand certain documents helped me as I conducted the interviews and focus groups. I asked for prior access to competency model descriptions, competency assessment and self-assessment tools, assistantship lists and descriptions, and portfolios. Third and finally, I decided that asking permission to see completed assessment tools and portfolios could be very beneficial. This could help me understand how the assessment results play a role in the evaluation and experiences of the graduate students.

### ***Researcher-Participant Relationship***

The relationship between the participants and me is important to consider in any study. Within this study, the interaction time between the two was minimal compared to other longer studies. This means that there was less time to develop an extensive relationship. This was beneficial in that I could avoid concerns of attachment, biases, and the affect the results of the study would have on an established relationship. On the other hand, it was challenging in that I was not able to spend time developing respect and a trusted relationship that could enhance data collection. Regardless, it was important for me to gain the respect of the participant in the short time of the interview and to ensure confidentiality so the participant was able to speak openly and provide honest responses. I contacted the Human Subjects Board at each case study site and both approved my study because I was granted approval through the Human Subjects Board at the University of Kansas. An informed consent statement was signed and all identifying information or responses were not used in the final write-up. However, in several instances, it seemed necessary or beneficial for me to identify the respondent or identify individuals being spoken about. When these instances occurred, I contacted the individual and sent them the relevant text and asked for permission to identify their name and/or identify the source of the quote. In all instances, I received permission. I believe this helped provide further validity to the study.

### ***Data Analysis***

Analysis of the data started during the first site visit and continued throughout the study. It was natural for me to analyze the data as the study progressed. After data collection was completed, time was spent with the all of the data in order to code and arrange it. I brainstormed ideas for possible themes and then after reading data several more times, final themes were decided upon. Using colored text and coding, I arranged the text into the decided themes. After

receiving feedback and edits from committee members, the themes did change again. To increase validity in the study, I used multiple sources and modes of evidence gathered from each case study site to achieve data triangulation. I utilized document analysis and interviews at both case study sites. Member checking was used on several pieces of the dissertation to ensure authenticity, as well as increase trustworthiness since confidentiality was promised.

### ***Role of the Researcher***

My role as the researcher raises several ethical considerations for this study. First, I had to understand my own reflexivity and biases. I had to be aware of my own biases and separate those out as I interviewed subjects and analyzed the data. I have had professional involvement with the creation of the competency model at the University of Kansas. I had to understand how my experiences and personal opinions influence my analysis of the data. This was done through memos during the interviews and through reflective journaling during the data coding and analysis process. Another ethical consideration was that I might be hesitant to provide results that could portray one institution in a negative light after I have established a relationship with the participants of that institution. Finally, confidentiality is an important concern. The participants provided a lot of information about the experiences and development of the graduate students. Professional development and individual competency models are not especially sensitive topics, but it is assumed that individuals would not want their information made public without prior consent. Names were removed to protect the identities of the participants. As mentioned earlier, when identification was necessary, approval for specific sections of text was requested and received.

The identity of the institutions was not kept confidential, however. This was part of the initial agreement when I contacted program coordinators. As spoken about earlier, I believe that

the name recognition and reputation of the schools will increase the quality and utility of the results.

### ***Limitations***

There are several limitations to this study. First, qualitative research can be hard to generalize to a larger population. Though I believe my results to be reliable, findings are not necessarily projected to all other student affairs master's level graduate programs. Instead, I have attempted to provide rich and deep description of the specific two case study sites visited. Second, the quality of this type of research is heavily dependent on my individual research skills. The quality of the data collection and interview results are influenced by my ability and experience. Analysis and interpretation are very time-consuming and highly subjective. Thus, the results are impacted by my skills and attitude. Finally, interviews and focus groups are not only influenced by me, but also by the views of the participants. I was a stranger to the participants and did not have time to set up a positive reputation. It is common for participants to express views that are consistent with social standards and to not present themselves negatively. This social desirability bias could have lead respondents to self-censor their actual views, especially when they are in a group setting. By identifying and restricting these limitations as much as possible, I was able to focus on the purpose and richness of the results produced by this qualitative case study research.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

This chapter is separated into three distinct sections. The first section is a case study of the College Student Personnel Program at Bowling Green State University and how a competency model is used in the graduate program there. The second section is structured similarly to the first section. However, the second section is instead about the Student Affairs in Higher Education Program at Colorado State University and its utilization of a competency model.

### **Bowling Green State University**

#### ***Introduction***

This section on the College Student Personnel Program at Bowling Green State University describes the creation, implementation, and utilization of a competency model to build and enhance learning experiences for graduate students. The section is structured around the main themes. First, the CSP program is described including the basic curriculum. Second, I provide a historical look at how the competency model was created and how it evolved over the years. Next, I discuss the actual competency model for the program. Fourth, I describe how students and supervisors are educated and trained on the utilization of the competency model. The fifth section is about the practical experiences that are provided for graduate students in the program. The CSP 6890 course and its link to the competency model and the experiences of the students are described in section six. Next, I look at the relationship between supervisors and the graduate students and how that affects the learning of the students. Eighth, I discuss what motivates students to be successful with the model and what holds them accountable to it. The next section involves the evaluation processes utilized by the program to evaluate and advance

students along the model. Finally, I discuss how the program collects and utilizes overall assessments results of the competency model to advance learning of all students.

### ***CSP Program***

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is a research II institution located in Bowling Green, Ohio. The College Student Personnel (CSP) Program there is “designed to prepare practitioners for positions in student affairs through an integration of theory-based course work emphasizing student development that is complemented by professional internships in college or university setting” (CSP, 2011, p. 1). The program provides a Master of Arts degree, which requires 42 semester hours of course work and a two-year internship. The required courses consist of a 24 semester credits in CSP required courses, and 6 semester credits in research and statistics, and 12 hours of electives (CSP). Students choose electives based on individual objectives and interests and consultation with their advisor. The CSP 6890 Supervised Field Experience in College Student Personnel course connects the experiential curriculum to the academic coursework.

Through the use of field experience as a principal methodology, this course introduces students to the nature of reflection-in-action, integrating experiential learning and classroom learning in the context of student affairs work in higher education. For purposes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating this experience, students are introduced to the experiential learning model, which provides them with the opportunity for self-assessment and evaluation of their emerging roles as professional student affairs practitioners (Experiential Handbook, 2010, p. 7).

Completion of a two-year paid internship is a required part of the CSP program at BGSU. Internships “offer the opportunity to acquire valuable professional experience and skills and to apply what is being learned in the classroom” (CSP, 2011, p. 2). Students complete an average of 20 contact hours per week at the internship site. Internship sites vary every year, but some examples of functional areas are housing, Greek life, academic advising, student activities, and

leadership development. Several internships sites are also available at separate institutions within driving distance from the BGSU campus. In conjunction with the internship, CSP students enroll in the CSP 6890 course during the fall and spring term of the first year and the fall term of the second year). In all nine credits are awarded for the CSP 6890 course. This course and how it relates to the competency model is discussed more at a later point.

Many students in the CSP program also choose an additional academic experience known as a practicum. A practicum experience typically lasts one semester and is an “excellent opportunity for students to gain experience in another facet of student affairs, deepen experience within a functional area, and/or learn about practice in a different institutional setting” (BGSU, 2011, p. 2). Students receive credit for this experience through the CSP 6970: Practicum in CSP course. Students may only complete two practica to fulfill the maximum 15 credit hours of experiential learning. Through flexibility with internships, practica, and electives, the program allows students to build an individual experience.

Although the goal of this master's program is to prepare generalist practitioners with a broad understanding of the role of student affairs in postsecondary education, it is recognized that each student's interests and skills will result in a more specific orientation toward select roles and functions. Therefore, each student will have the opportunity to select elective classes and practica that will support the concepts taught in required courses, enhance the student's internship experiences, and allow the student to develop unique areas of knowledge and skills (BGSU, p. 2).

The CSP Program at BGSU serves about 75 full-time students at any given time. About half of the groups are in the first year cohort and the other half are in the second year cohort. The program has seven full-time faculty members. These faculty members teach the academic courses and also serve as academic advisors for the students. Each faculty member has about six first year advisees and six second year advisees.

### ***History of BGSU Competency Model Creation***

Dr. Leila Moore was a visiting faculty member to the CSP program at BGSU between 1985 and 1987. Dr. Moore was an active member in the profession of student affairs and involved in ACPA. She would go on to be President of ACPA during 1991-19992. Most of Dr. Moore's research focused on leadership development, multicultural competencies, cross-cultural communication, professional competencies for student affairs practitioners, and career mobility of student affairs professionals. While she was visiting, she expressed interest in helping contribute to the master's degree standards. She eventually helped create the initial competency model for the CSP program. One professor interviewed believed that the competency model was implemented to produce some standard outcomes (ends) as there was no consensus or standardization of the curriculum (means). There were eleven original competencies: conflict mediation, group dynamics, counseling, advising, working effectively with diverse and/or underrepresented populations, management, problem solving, supervision, utilizing resources, verbal communication, and written communication. One faculty member said that it was created as an "open-ended assessment based on demonstrable and measurable outcomes." Over time the model was adapted based on informal feedback by students and through discussion by faculty members. Self-knowledge was added at some point based on the values of the program. Then, students pushed to add a multicultural competency area in the 1990s. One faculty member said this about adding the multicultural competency: "We did that at the students' request. Students came to us and said we need to have this. We think it is important. Let's add it. We said, fine, we buy your argument for that."

In 2008, a transition was made to the ACPA competency model. Dr. Maureen Wilson, a faculty member in the program at the time and now the current program chair, was on the ACPA



group that was creating the document so the information was available. Dr. Wilson encouraged the faculty to look at the new model. One faculty member described the change as pretty easy without any strong internal or external pressures. The faculty member remembered comparing the original document and the new document.

I sat down with both models and map them out next to each other to see if there was overlap. It seemed to me at the time that there was sufficient overlap that it warranted going to something that the whole profession subscribed to. Being consistent with what the professions believes new professionals should have once they leave here. We all looked at it. Then I did a little quick and dirty compares and it seemed to map pretty well, so it was a no-brainer. I don't recall that it was particularly pretentious, the faculty discussion we had.

Dr. Wilson remembered a similar evolution of the model. She stated that it was a professional skills model (that Leila Moore developed) when she joined the program. Dr. Wilson was involved with the ACPA competencies task force that Patrick Love chaired. Dr. Wilson believed that literature and standards, as well as the opinion of faculty members, guided the creation of the ACPA competency model.

I think we looked at a lot of literature of what different groups said is important in student affairs. We looked at CAS standards, at some literature, at the Student Services book. We tried to do a pretty broad sweep of what people are saying is important. We just went through this process of what came up the most in different places. Obviously our judgment as committee members came into play. I think that that was our best call at saying this is what the field says is needed.

Dr. Wilson believes that the transition for the CSP program from the original model to the ACPA document was simple because there was an “awful lot of overlap with our professional skills model.” Dr. Wilson recommended to the other faculty that the program transition over to the ACPA model to be “more in line or consistent with the field and what the field says about this.”

Some of the pre-existing titles of the competency areas were almost identical or the content was, so it was easy for the most part to move to the new model according to the faculty members interviewed. All three of the faculty members interviewed stated that personal self-

knowledge was missing from the original ACPA model so they decided to add it to the existing list of competencies in the ACPA model. “Self-knowledge had been a part of the initial CSP professional skills model, so the faculty kept self-knowledge in there because we thought it was an important skill to have” (Faculty Member).

As the ACPA model was being revised, NASPA and ACPA came up with the current model which the CSP program utilizes currently. Again, the adoption of the new model was not a hard decision; however it is not like all of the faculty members are totally satisfied with the final model that the CSP program is using now. One faculty member provided this description of the process.

I really think that the biggest thing was that we did not see that what they were adopting and developing was terribly different than what we had done. They mapped and compared pretty closely. We decided to use the more extent, widely disseminated model rather than the one we developed ourselves. There isn't total satisfaction among our faculty any of those models that either the ACPA or ACPA/NASPA uses in terms of how it maps onto our curriculum.

The program used to have a comprehensive exam or a thesis as the final requirement for the program, or “culminating experience.” In 2008, the faculty decided to move to a professional portfolio after agreeing neither the comprehensive exam nor the thesis was the appropriate final measure of learning outcomes for the program. The portfolio is facilitated through the capstone seminar that the students enroll in their final semester. “The competency portfolio does a very good job of demonstrating and showing us artifacts of the competencies that they have developed and still need to develop” (Faculty Member). The difference is that the portfolio doesn't tap into things that they know, while the comprehensive exam is exclusively about knowledge acquisition and information integration and synthesis. The portfolio will be discussed more at a later point.

Overall, the faculty members interviewed were content with the overall ACPA/NASPA

model utilized currently. All agreed that it is a good tool to have and use with the graduate students in the field.

Even though they have changed models three different times, the models were more similar than different. Two of the faculty members mentioned that changes were inevitable in the future because of new faculty feedback and the influences of the professional organizations.

We have tinkered more than we have made significant revolutionary changes to the curriculum. We are going to get three new faculty next year. The faculty that are most familiar with that curricular model are retiring or will be retiring. I think it is highly likely that this new group of faculty will say that that curriculum was developed in the 1980s so let's go back and look at those basic assumptions, are those still valid? Do we need to change? What do we need to change? Is it change predicated on these kinds of competencies? Are there other learning outcomes?

When supervisors and graduate students were asked about the switch to the ACPA/NASPA model, all of the respondents were content with the switch. The graduate students had not seen the previous model so they did not know the difference. However, they spoke of appreciation of what the model could do for them. One graduate student said that "our purpose is to develop the whole person, so I think that all of these competencies that touch on different areas are helping us be credible and that we are being a whole person as well and hitting on these different areas." Others spoke of the importance of being in line with professional organizations and having common values. One student said: "I think more functionally and practically, it helps explain what student affairs is and what it does....at least it then it gives us some sort of common ground and common voice to be able to say this is what student affairs does at a higher education level." Another student said: "It is nice that the professional organizations are on board with it and working together so that you don't have to pick and choose that you want to go at."

Internship supervisors were very happy with the switch, though they were not involved with the decision to do so. One supervisor said this: "It was a smooth transition. This was what

we were going to do....I mean, so many of us were using them as practitioners that it was not a big deal. It seemed like a good match.” Professional development is heavily emphasized by the supervisors and the program so respondents revealed that the ACPA/NASPA competencies help direct that development. “I am not sure why they switched, but I do think there is a high degree of importance placed on professional development on Bowling Green and I think the competencies help play into that” (Supervisor). Both supervisors interviewed spoke of the benefits of using the model on for their graduate supervisees, as well as for their own professional development.

I actually just purchased the actual copy from ACPA/NASPA because I want to use it for myself as well. I think I need to understand the model more to help educate my grads to develop the model more. So I have been really going through it the last couple months, and it has been interesting because the things that I thought I was competent on, I learned that maybe I need to do some work in that area so I have really enjoyed the model.

The evolution of the competency model and the eventual adoption of the ACPA/NASPA document brings the CSP program to the model, curriculum, experiences, and assessment that it uses today. The specific competency model is described in the section following.

### ***Competency Model***

The CSP program uses a competency model to develop and characterize an individual’s strengths as an emerging professional in student affairs (Experiential Handbook, 2010). The program adopted the ACPA/NASPA competencies document, which is entitled *ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (2010). A copy of this document is included in Appendix B. This purpose of this document is outlined as follows:

This set of Professional Competency Areas is intended to define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals, regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field. All student affairs professionals should be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the basic list of outcomes under each competency area regardless of how they entered the profession. Thus, this document is intended to inform the design of professional

development opportunities for student affairs professionals by providing outcomes that can be incorporated into the design of specific curriculum and training opportunities. Additionally, if student affairs professionals desire to grow in a particular competency area, they can examine expected learning and skills in the intermediate and advanced level. Such examination allows individual practitioners to use this document to help guide their own choices about professional development opportunities afforded to them (ACPA/NASPA, p. 1).

The ACPA/NASPA competency model includes ten competency areas: advising and helping, assessment, evaluation, and research, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ethical professional practice, history, philosophy, and values, human and organizational resources, law, policy, and governance, leadership, personal foundations, and student learning and development. Each of the competency areas has a listing of knowledge, skills, or attitudes that student affairs practitioners are expected to demonstrate. These lists are “divided into basic, intermediate, and advanced levels that delineate the increasing complexity and ability that should be demonstrated by practitioners as they grow in their professional development” (ACPA/NASPA, p. 5). The document is primarily intended for student affairs professionals practicing in the United States. However, the document does outline how it could be used for graduate affairs programs.

Graduate student affairs program faculty may choose to use this document to develop or refine their curriculum to better address the competencies expected of practitioners in the field.... This document may also be a useful tool in creating tailored internship experiences or in advising graduating students about additional education or training opportunities that might be needed in a new position for which they have been hired. Finally, this document may help inform those supervising graduates of professional preparation programs as they prepare a supportive learning environment where graduates transition to their first full-time professional role and design their professional development plans. (ACPA/NASPA, p. 3)

The CSP program uses the model without any changes or adaptations, but several other pieces of documentation supplement the model, in terms of reflection and evaluation. These documents will be discussed at a later point. On the whole, the students, supervisors, and faculty are happy with the competencies included in the model. They believed that it includes all

necessary competencies for student affairs practitioners and none need to be added or deleted. One student said this about the model: “What I really like about the whole model is that it feels like a syllabus, almost. I mean here is what you need to focus on, here are the learning outcomes.” Another student said: “it is nice that the professional organizations are on board with it and working together so that you don’t have to pick and choose what you want to go at. It is laid out for us. I can’t think of anything that they are overlooking, I think they are really complete.” Supervisors agreed with the students in the makeup of the model. “The competencies that they use here are really.....these are the ones you need to know really and these are what you need to be competent in in order to move up.”

All respondents were asked about the individual competency areas and which were easiest to develop and which ones were the hardest to develop. Most respondents believed that advising and helping was the area that students worked on the most. It was either an important part of their internship responsibilities or something that was sought out as a passion area. The students specifically mentioned personal foundations, as well. This was an area that they believed they worked on every day. One student said: “I think personal foundations is kind of an underlying competency because you should be bringing that balanced perspective when you work on all of the other competencies. I see that as more of a, you know, have you matured, have you adjusted to this lifestyle kind of thing, it is not really content-based.”

On the flip side, several areas were mentioned by respondents as competency areas that students struggled to get experience in. Most of the areas were “content-based.” Three areas were most commonly mentioned by respondents: law, policy, and governance; history, philosophy, and values, and assessment, research, and evaluation. Students said the content-based areas were often covered in classes, but there was not as much opportunity to experience them unless one

was to seek out those opportunities. One faculty member discussed the separation between the practical experiences and the academic coursework.

The struggle with some of them I found is that some were developed on the student affairs side and some were developed on the academic side and sometimes they were separated. And for awhile I was going to separate mine, but then we realized that it was too much like this. Some of the ones that ACPA, I think are geared towards the academic side, were not as high, like student development, sometimes it is there and sometimes not.

This same faculty member spoke of the struggle that students have with differentiating knowledge sets from skills sets. The three questions for graduate students in the program that all of the faculty members emphasized were what do you believe or value, what do you know, and what can you do. These three questions serve as the framework for student learning in the program. The competencies can theoretically be categorized in one or all of those areas.

“Students struggle a lot to articulate what you know and what you can do” (Faculty Member). I heard the students say that it was sometimes hard to get experience in an area when the relevant course was not offered until later in the program. One supervisor spoke of the many opportunities to achieve the competencies if a student took the initiative, whether it is an internship, practicum, or volunteer experience. “The majority of this one way or another they are able to get. They just need to seek it out the opportunities are available in [the internship] for them to get all of these competencies, I would think...in one way or another.”

None of the respondents had much to openly critique about the ACPA/NASPA Competency model. As one faculty member said, “it is important what they putting out there for the field; these are the best practices.” However one supervisor did speak of how long the document was, and had concerns of whether the graduate students actually understood the model.

It is just a lot of content, and I think sometime for graduate student maybe specifically, it might be a little overwhelming for them to understand what the competencies really are. I

actually had this conversation with someone else. I think some of the things that are in the competencies, they are getting that experience, but how it is worded in the competencies, it seems like the grads might not understand that they are really getting that experience. And so, what I experience with my second year grad was, well I still need to get these competencies and I want to make sure that I am getting them. Well, you are getting those experiences already. Here is how you are getting those experiences. So I think that would be the only thing that, it is pretty long and lengthy and sometimes I don't think people really understand what it is getting at.

On the other hand, students reported that the document was useful and easy to understand. It was actually appreciated how specific it was and how "it is laid out for us."

### ***Education about the Competency Model***

The students first learn of the competency model briefly when they visit campus for the on-campus interview process. They then learn about it more during their orientation process when they first get to campus. The model is also on the website for potential, incoming, and current students to view. It is formally covered more in-depth during the CSP 6890 course. Both the students and the faculty members agreed with this general process of how students learn about the model. Students did struggle to remember how much the competency model was covered in detail during the interview days or the orientation, but did concede learning at least a little bit about it. Students also mentioned the informal education they received from their peers. One student said, "I think that is part of it, and maybe this is a function of the program entirely, but a lot of information that is passed on is year to year, you know the second years to the first years or in passing with our faculty members some times. I feel like it has been awhile since I have had any formal conversation about the competencies."

Supervisors learn about the model through an annual training that happens in the fall every year. One faculty member spoke of the purpose of the training session for supervisors.

Part of what we want to accomplish there is to help them understand the academic program and how we might work together better, what the goals are, what the expectations are of them as supervisors and so forth. It may be scheduled at a time that



they can't be there, so they may or may not have actually participated in it. You know, one time in the fall isn't really enough but it is hard to schedule too much of that, but I think that that is where you know the meeting I had with the res life folks and how to strengthen that into their professional development plans in the departments.

One supervisor provided a similar description of their training session. "They bring a panel of faculty members, and they talk about the nuts and bolts, what needs to be filled out when, all of that stuff that needs to be done initially." However, not every supervisor is able to attend this training session as mentioned earlier, so some of the information is lost. One supervisor spoke of a disconnect between the academic program and the internship supervisors. This supervisor said that he learns most of the necessary information about the requirements for his graduate student through informal discussions with his own peers and his own graduate students. He depends on other individuals at the institution, as some of people "have been around for awhile so they know it historically." One of the supervisors was embarrassed to admit never having seen the actual competency model before I provided it during the interview. This supervisor was not even sure who his graduate student's faculty advisor was. One student spoke of a similar lack of connection between the supervisor and the academic program as "the only way that my supervisor is involved with my faculty advisor is submitting a semester evaluation and that goes from my supervisor to my advisor."

### ***Practical Experiences***

The practical experiences that students receive become the core of their learning experience. They get "hands on" training in paid internships, for-credit practica, and other volunteer experiences. Faculty members, supervisors, and graduate students recognize the internship as a necessary part of their learning. One faculty member gave this description of the internships.

I think from the beginning of the program or nearly the beginning of the program that that

internship has been required here. So most like to say that graduate assistantships are available, but here we call it an internship intentionally versus an assistantship and you don't get in without it... That internship and practice piece has been really fundamental to this program from the beginning. So that model largely existed. Transitioning to the competency document was just a little twist on what we were already doing.

All of the students believed that they worked on developing their necessary competencies more through their practical experiences than in the classroom. One student said: "my internship site is diverse enough so I can find different ways to fulfill the competencies in what I do". The students talk the most about the competency model in their CSP 6890 course, which focuses on their internship. Another student added, "I think that it is very internship focused because after all the most we are talking about it is in the field experience class. But it is almost like we overlook the opportunity to if you are going to write a paper on the issue for class, that is a great time to choose a cultural competency or a historical area to write about and that is not really the focus usually" (Student). The students were careful to say that they did still develop some of their competencies through their coursework. Most of them just spend more time and energy on their internships and practica so it is natural for them to develop more skills during their practical experiences. One student spoke of how she developed competencies in both the internship and practicum site.

I would say that it is a mix of the internship and practicum sites. Because I had a lot of practicum hours from this past year. And I know that I was intentional about working on the competencies that I was not necessarily working on in my internship sites... during those practica. At the same time, for me, I look at some of the competencies and I think that the way that I need to work on these is through my class work and so I am deliberate about how I can improve on them in my class work. For me, it is more about... I guess just assessing what I have available, what opportunities I have available and where I can most the most of them. So I would say definitely it is the hands-on stuff with the internship and practicum, but I would not put class work out of sight.

The supervisors interviewed spoke very positively about their own graduate students and their initiative in seeking out additional experiences to advance their skills and knowledge. The

supervisors believed that their internships provided very well-rounded and fulfilling experiences for the graduate student that could help them fulfill almost all of the competencies. If a competency could not be met, there are always volunteer experiences and practica available. One supervisor spoke specifically of the focus on practicum by the CSP program.

The CSP program places a high degree of importance on the practicums here where I know some of the grads, mine from two years ago, did two practicums in one semester. Which is a lot, it takes away from their assistantship at times even. But they did this because they wanted these experiences from other departments and they do that. They do have the opportunity to volunteer with other departments through different committees and different things like that. But I would say that they going to do a practicum more likely for that experience than to volunteer.....I have even seen the practicum experience stress out the grads a little bit. When am I going to get this experience? Which practicum am I going to do and different stuff like that?

The faculty members want to see the students get a variety of experiences. They want to see the intentional thought and reflection so the right experiences are chosen. One faculty member said this:

We tell them that if there is an area of need for improvement and you don't think you are getting that through your internship, where else can you go out and get that. They then can identify practicum opportunities that are credit bearing courses but are not paid experiences that like the internship. They can then pursue those or an independent study or something else or maybe in class.

Ultimately, the student must be able to connect all of their experiences both in and outside the classroom in order to advance their learning and develop the necessary competencies. The competency model and the CSP 6890 course are two of the main resources in place to help students make those connections.

### ***CSP 6890 Course***

As mentioned previously, the CSP 6890 course becomes the “glue” course for the students. One of the four objectives for the course is “to become familiar with the departmental experiential learning model (reflection-in-action, experiential learning, and professional

competencies) as a tool for describing planning, and evaluating experiences gained in the internship and in the departmental courses” (Experiential Learning Handbook). Every student has a faculty advisor and is part of a 6890 course with about 6 other students within their own cohort who have the same advisor. This description of the course was provided by a faculty member.

Every advisor meets with the student in the context of the 6890 classes once a month and the focus of those classes is on their internship experience and as well as professional development that we don’t cover in class. So it is a 3 course sequence and it starts in the first semester they are here. We focus on adjustment issues and a supervisory relationship. The second semester is the spring and the focus is on ethical decision-making and then the second fall is on leadership. The last semester, rather than taking the 6890 course, they take capstone seminar.

It seems like the CSP 6890 course had two main components. Students were completing monthly reflective journaling and they were meeting about once per month to discuss their journals and their “artifacts.” These artifacts are examples of ways that you have met a specific competency. One student described it as an “experience or an interaction with a student or within your internship that displayed a certain competency.” The reflective journaling was required by students to discuss their general experiences in the program, their internship, their practica, etc. Faculty members constantly want to engage student in reflection over where they have been, where they are, and where they want to go. A faculty member provides this reflection summary.

Where do they think they are, where do they want to be and how likely is it that their internship will provide this opportunity. And then we always talk about that. This is a jumping off point for all the discussions. Which ones do you feel pretty good about now, and which ones do think there is needed improvement in and that becomes a pretty significant portion of the discussion? We keep touching back on that regularly.

Some students are also asked to complete separate reflective pieces for their supervisor. This reflection helps facilitate some self-actualization, which then will assist the graduate student and the supervisor to work together to create goals and plan future experiences. A supervisor I

interviewed provided her own opinion on how reflection and goal-setting are important for the student.

When we look at our goals, I try to help them see will you have two years in the program here, but I have a longer time I am thinking about. I am trying to look at five years out. That program may not fit now, but it may fit three years from now. So you might not be a part of it, but I still want you to understand how that fits into the big picture. And sometimes it is juggling what they want to learn, to know, to do with the priorities of the office. And they may not always coincide very neatly, but then we have to say how can we change this to help you develop along the path that you want to develop and yet still benefit what our student population needs.

Faculty members use three basic questions as the basis of personal reflection and discussion throughout the program. These questions are: “What do you believe or value? What do you know? What can you do?” These questions force students to reflect on who they are and who they want to become. Supervisors are not aware of these questions, though I felt like they were being implicitly asked by supervisors of the students. Both supervisors and faculty agree that the personal awareness is a competency that students struggle with and repetitive practice with reflection and self-evaluation could assist with development in that area.

A few of the students said that the reflections did not necessarily have to be tied to the competencies unless they wanted. Some of the reflective journal templates that I observed did have specific questions about the competencies. This spoke to the difference in teaching styles between faculty members in the CSP 6890 course. Students, supervisors, and faculty members all mentioned that each 6890 course could be different based on the teaching style of the faculty member or the makeup of the students in the course. One student described the difference in this way.

It depends on the faculty member so with you have to have an artifact every time you meet. Others, you just kind of talk about your experiences and it turns into a vent-fest....So we have our reflection due every month and again, it works differently with each faculty member. So my advisor would read it and email me back his thoughts. We had an understanding in our group where we said it was fine for him to address what we

reflected to him. We would talk about those various issues, papers, within our group. But I don't know how other groups did it.

Neither students nor faculty members thought that having different experience in each CSP 6890 section was necessarily a bad thing, but just a difference to note. Students agreed that they did not want the exact same experience as each one of their peers. Faculty members were quick to point out that it is the interaction of several factors that creates the overall experience. One faculty member specifically spoke of group dynamics in the CSP 6890 course.

That group, as a group, gelled better than anyone I ever had and worked better together. I had had groups where if I aligned everyone individually, but as a unit, it never...it never quite worked. The nature of conversations and the nature on what you can do depends on the particular mixture of people that you end up with. I would say that..I quibble with that..your experience depends on who your advisor is, but how the two of you click, how the group clicks.

The group of students in the CSP 6890 course provides a specific social environment for each student as the student makeup of each group is different. The groups are picked somewhat randomly by the chair with some intentionality to have a mix of demographics in each group. Student spoke of how the dynamics of the group are influenced by the style of the faculty member but also by the personalities of the students. Sometimes the groups are very close and connected, and sometimes not. However, students rarely ask to change groups or advisors. A faculty member described why advisor changes can occur.

I think that people used to move sometimes if they are doing a thesis and had connected with someone else based on the topic or that sort of thing. I had a woman switch out of my group one year...we had had a pretty large group for some reason, and a pretty extraverted group and she was a pretty big introvert. There was another group that was smaller and one of her friends was in it and it was a better fit for her. And I was fine with that. We don't get a lot of switches and it is not like you can only go to your advisor for help or feedback or whatever. I think some students see that as well. If they don't form a particularly strong bond with their advisor, they might still have a strong bond with their group and they know that they got access to other faculty.

In the fourth semester, the students do not enroll in a CSP 6890 course, but instead enroll

in CSP 6050 Capstone Seminar. The capstone course has about 12 students in it, and these may or may not be the same students as those in the CSP 6890 course. CSP 6050 is designed to review, summarize, and connect all of the experiences of the students throughout the two years in the program. It is during this course that students discuss their personal and professional values, their skills, their plans for the future, and how they plan to put “it all together.” It is also in this course that the professor requires the electronic portfolio. This electronic portfolio is the culminating project for the student and the core evaluation piece for the competency model. It will be discussed at a later point.

### ***Supervisor-Student Relationships***

It was agreed by all respondents that graduate students spend the largest percentage of their time in their internship. This means that the supervisor is a big part of their experience and their social environment. When I asked one supervisor what the most important factor was in determining how successful a student would be with the competency model, that supervisor had this to say. “What is important? I think the supervision. The graduate students get the supervision.....I don’t think that they would continue with their competencies unless people are asking that, where they are with them. In processing, in one-on-ones, in meeting with their supervisor, I think are probably key to the success of the completion of their competencies as well as the program here.”

When the prospective students interview with the CSP program, they might or might not be interviewing with their potential direct supervisor. Given logistical matters and a constant transition, especially in housing which has the most internships, students do not get to intentionally pick their supervisors. The supervisor experience of the graduate internship supervisors ranges from zero years to more than ten years. This leads to very different

experiences for the students. However, faculty stated that very few changed internships each year, and rarely is the change due to a bad supervisor. The change of internship is usually due to a fit issue or a desire by the graduate student to get a new experience in a different functional area. One faculty member described the process for me:

We don't evaluate our supervisors and gather all of that information in and see who is ranking higher than others and get to the ones who are ranking lower and try to fix the things that are wrong. Rather, we rely on informal networks of understanding.....We have a pretty good handle on where students are getting a good experience and where students are getting a less good experience. And we also know that less good experiences are a function of a person-environment fit. So we might put you at Bluffton and you might have a terrible experience your first year at Bluffton and you might choose to switch experiences and that is perfectly fine.....So when we look at that it is not a systemic problem at the internship site. It is more of a person-environment interaction....Now I think that part of that is that so many of our internships have been stable over time. Now the supervisors change, but the institutions and the positions have been pretty stable over time so we have gained a pretty good understanding of what is going on there.

Overall, the supervisors interviewed spoke of their enjoyment in building relationships with the graduate student and having a role in their professional development. For the most part, the supervisors are using general interpersonal relationship skills and managerial skills to supervise the student. As stated earlier, both supervisors and faculty members stated that more could be done to educate supervisors about the program, skills for supervising graduate students, and the competency model.

This apparent lack of communication or centralization of supervision standards does provide some supervisors freedom to utilize the competency model through their own style, however. One supervisor has created a rubric to use with graduate students at that internship. This rubric helps the graduate student, reflect, plan, and “map out future experiences” based on the competencies. She created her own tool because no tool was provided for her to do what she wanted to do with the competency document.

It is not the documents that are important, though, according to one supervisor. It is the



intentional conversations that are the most important factor in determining the success of the graduate student.

I think the conversations, because what you get out into the world of work, typically you are not going to have...I know we all want to have organizational development, we all want a strong HR, we all want a strong evaluation process. But often times, we get out into the world, and our supervisor, it is not their forte. You can still engage them in conversations even if they are not helping you fill out a form once a month or a once a semester or even doing a very structured evaluation once a semester. You can still engage them in a conversation and part of what I try to teach the grads is that is not your supervisor's responsibility to help you develop. You have to take responsibility for your own development and you have to engage that supervisor in that development. It is a two way street.

This supervisor implies that it does take more than a strong supervisor to make the student successful, though; it takes some initiative and responsibility on the part of the student.

### ***Motivations***

One of the purposes of the competency model according to one supervisor is to hold students accountable to the required skills and outcomes. However, this supervisor thought that some needed this accountability process and some did not. Many of the strong students in the CSP program are intrinsically motivated to get involved in several learning opportunities during their two years in order to maximize their experience. Faculty members agreed that most students were very active participants in their own education.

With respondents, I raised a question of whether the positive national reputation of the CSP program at BGSU attracts stronger students, so the student population is more likely to be successful with a competency model. All agreed that BGSU definitely has strong students, and possibly a stronger student population than the average. "There is a different student and they might have more intrinsic motivation to be very, very good or want to be the best" (Faculty member). However, one faculty member pointed out that not every strong undergraduate student becomes a strong graduate student.

You know, there are students here are the best of the best and there are some perfectly okay. You know that is the case at a number of really good programs I think. As I said before, we don't miss very often but when we miss.....we miss big. So, it is not like every student is going to blow the roof off the place. But I think that certainly they would leave with a lot of key concepts in the field and this competency model is a part of it. And we certainly try to push that link. I tell students I want us to graduate scholarly practitioners and scholars with a good eye towards practice. I want you to have good skills and this helps frame this.

As mentioned earlier, the students do understand the importance that the CSP program places on personal and professional development. There are several extrinsic factors that help motivate students to develop themselves utilizing the competency model. The ones mentioned most prevalent in documents and interviews were influence from faculty members, influence from supervisors, required reflections and artifacts, the semester evaluations, and the required electronic portfolio.

However, students acknowledge that with the differences in styles by supervisors and faculty members, each graduate student does have to rely somewhat on their own intrinsic motivation and initiative in order to be successful. During the interview, one student spoke of spending several hours already during the summer putting together some items for the portfolio that would be due the next spring. She said, "it is just that I want to do that to prepare." This astonished the other students in the focus group and seemed to produce a little unspoken angst and peer pressure that they earlier had denied existed in the group.

This focus group of students also spoke of the benefit of having a competency model that was identified by ACPA and NASPA as being the standards of practice. These students thought it would be great if there could be some certification provided if students could prove they met the identified competencies.

I think it would really helpful, and I don't know if there is any interest at the administrative level of NASPA or ACPA, but to go one step further with this and look to it to have some certification or something like that, because anything that is going to

make you stand out as a candidate in a program that is choosing to do something that is maybe above and beyond..having a competency at all, getting a little boost from that would be great.

Students thought this would force programs to improve and adhere to standards or be left behind, but also reward programs that were providing quality experiences. “People will be looking at schools and say I want to get that certification. This school is going to prepare me for that and this one is not” (Student). I asked faculty members what they thought of the idea and they were hesitant to think it could be something that would be adequately evaluated and awarded. “We have said, ‘what are you looking for there?’ Because a certification of participation is real different than an assessment of your knowledge or skills....And even if you know the content, that may or may not speak to the regular skills in that area. A lot of these things are pretty difficult to measure and in this field.” Faculty members, like supervisors, stated that it simply comes down to intentional planning and seeking out of opportunities.

The bottom line is that you have to be the one to apply for that and follow through to arrange these opportunities. So talking with your supervisor, talking to your advisor, talking to your classmates, talking to the second-years, there are pretty of ideas to be had and how to do that. It is taking the initiative and prioritizing that. And I think that there enough students who do that really well who provide a good role model and example for that.

I asked the students if the work of others influences their own. I also asked if the entire cohort was more collaborative or competitive in terms of meeting individual competencies. The students all stated that there is no outward sense of peer pressure among the group. One student did speak of an underlying sense of pressure. “We are always looking towards these other groups and they way people are doing things to get there and develop their competencies so there is this sense I guess of underlying pressure.” However, the other students disagreed that they felt any pressure. To them, it was not pressure, but rather an emphasis and importance. All of the students talked about the competency model, the program, and the coursework with their peers.

This creates accountability and individual drive. The second year cohort also provides guidance and suggestions to the second years in order to help them succeed. One student said this.

There is a general sense that it is important. And kind of going back to what [he] said, I would disagree that there is a sense of a pressure. But they place a lot of importance on it and that is reflected in people tend to take the competencies seriously. And it is not something that is just in the syllabus and then forgotten. People actually think about it. I have had conversations with people about it outside of class and outside of advisor groups, just you know, between friends and it comes up. So it is not just a top down kind of...

### ***Competency Evaluation***

The evaluation steps conducted at the beginning, throughout the program, and at the end are all part of the intentional, overall evaluation and assessment process that connect to the competency model. From my research, I gathered that there are five different components of the competency evaluation process: the reflections and artifact discussions through the CSP 6890 course, self-evaluations by the students, evaluations of the students by supervisors, informal and formal discussions with the faculty advisor, and the final electronic portfolio. Each component provides important reflection and/or feedback for the student as they matriculate through the program and attempt to develop the necessary skills and knowledge sets identified in the competency model.

#### ***CSP 6890 Course***

The reflective journals and artifacts have been covered extensively in previous sections so I will not explain them again in this section. However, it is important to point out that these are an important part of the evaluation process. They provide important feedback to both the student and the faculty member, in order to know how the student is doing and if any future discussions need to take place. One student said this about his reflections: “So we have our reflection due every month and again, it works differently with each faculty member. So my

advisor would read it and email me back his thoughts. We had an understanding in our group where we said it was fine for him to address what we reflected to him. We would talk about those various issues, papers, within our group.” As mentioned earlier, each of the faculty advisors had a different style with the CSP 6890 course, but overall the point was to provide some sort of structure for the student and ensure that individual and group reflections were taking place. I did ask the students if reflections were shared with supervisors. Only one student conceded that he had shared past reflections with supervisors. This student saw it as a chance to engage his supervisor in additional discussions about professional development.

### *Self Evaluations*

Students complete three self evaluations. They do it at the beginning of the first fall semester, beginning of the first spring semester, and at the beginning of the third semester. In this self evaluation, the students assess their level of competency in each of the ten specific competency areas within the model. For each of the questions below, they must provide a rating of basic, intermediate, or advanced:

1. Where I perceive myself to be
2. Where I'd like to be
3. Potential for development through my internship.

Students are also asked to answer a few other questions.

- List your top three competency strengths.
- Which competencies can you count on using most in your internship?
- What can you do to develop competency areas that you would like to enhance?

They must turn this evaluation into their CSP 6890 course faculty member. Students are also encouraged to hold on to a copy of each of their three self evaluations because they will be

helpful for the analysis portion of the electronic portfolio. Two faculty members pointed out the interesting, but not surprising phenomenon regarding the students' self-evaluation results. Students self-report high ratings initially and then some of those ratings decrease throughout the program. One faculty member described it like this, "Invariably people go backward on their assessment. They will have rated themselves more highly initially and then they will start to learn that I did not know as much about this as I thought I did. It is probably a more realistic assessment so they back up. So we usually talk about that... it is not like you lost skills, it is just a more realistic understanding of them. The students did not seem to place much sense of anxiety about these self evaluations, mostly because they refer specifically to the internship experience and because they did not necessarily view them as an accountability piece. One student had this to say, "I mean we have our end of the semester evaluations where we evaluate our internship experience. And that does have, you know like rate yourself on each of these, and have you improved on any of these. Write about those. I don't know if that keeps us accountable. We are not being graded on if we are developing." The faculty said the intention is that the evaluation could be paired with the evaluation by the supervisor to initiate a larger discussion about how the student is developing.

### *Supervisor Evaluations*

Much has been discussed about the importance of the mentoring relationship between the supervisor and the graduate student. An important part of this relationship, as well as the evaluation of the competency model is a written performance evaluation. Supervisors are expected to complete an evaluation on the student at the end of each student and provide a copy to the student and to the student's faculty advisor. This evaluation does not necessarily mirror the competency model, as supervisors have the independence to use whatever evaluation form they

please. One student did express appreciation at the way that competencies were woven throughout all aspects of the job. “He has been very intentional about including the competencies within our work description, our job descriptions.” Once the faculty advisor receives this evaluation, he or she can pool together all the evaluation pieces to facilitate a healthy discussion. One faculty advisor did say that occasionally a supervisor fails to provide the evaluation despite attempts by the advisor and student to retrieve it. Most faculty members usually move on without it so as to not hold up the process and punish the student. Another faculty member was also quick to point out that supervisors are encouraged to contact faculty sooner than the end of the semester if there are problems with a student in order to take more immediate action to solve problems.

#### *Discussions with Advisors*

Throughout this section on BGSU, intentional discussions have been emphasized. I was impressed by the caring approach of the faculty members I met with and I could believe their statements that students did not hesitate to come to them with problems. The faculty members seemed to enjoy the relationship-building and mentoring the most in their job and saw personal and professional development and education of the student as the main purposes of their work. Faculty each had their own style in how they would learn about their student advisees, but all of them viewed the ongoing relationship as an evaluation component. The faculty members use the evidence before him or her to make decisions on how the student was doing and what future learning experiences needed to take place.

So I know that there is a performance issue with a student because they told me. I picked it up through their monthly reflections, those field experiences meetings. So I learn about it that way. Sometimes I don't learn about it until I get their evaluation at the end of the semester from their supervisor. Because at the end of the semester, you fill out those forms there, so the student's evaluation of the internship and the internship supervisor's evaluation of the student.

The faculty member and the other evaluative components are all put in place in order to increase the likelihood that the student will be ready to complete the capstone course and the electronic portfolio.

### *Electronic Portfolio*

As part of the final capstone course, each graduate student is asked to create an electronic portfolio. “The competency portfolio does a very good job of demonstrating and showing us artifacts of the competencies that they have developed and still need to develop” (Faculty member). This electronic portfolio must include a current resume, a personal statement of mission, a professional development plan resulting from the student’s professional knowledge evaluation, and artifacts supporting the student’s professional competency assessment. A faculty member described the portfolio in this way.

What is it that you need to know, what is it that you need to be able to do, what is it that you value? And so the valuing piece, they write their own philosophy of student affairs work, the knowledge piece, they do what we call a professional development plan. Things that they know pretty well, things that they don’t know at all and develop a three to five year plan about how they are going to improve their knowledge in those areas, and what are they able to do is demonstrated through their electronic portfolio and of course those other two things are included in the portfolio as well. So it is all integrated. And I have come to think about it is that what we are really talking about is head, heart, and hands. What I know is head, what I value is heart and what can I do is hands. Then they have to have all three of those pieces.

This portfolio is the culminating project for the student and something that is spoken of throughout the program by advisors, second-year students, and knowledgeable supervisors. As part of the competency assessment, students are asked provide artifacts for “at least three at the basic level and at least three at the advanced, or basic, intermediate, and advanced” (Faculty member). The students that I spoke with had not received this exact information. “The only thing I have ever heard, and maybe it is just a rumor...so this ought to be an interesting tidbit...was



that for the capstone, we need to be at like 3, 3, and 3. Or 3, 3, and 4 maybe I suppose? So we are advancing” (Student)? I also struggled to find any documented information regarding the exact requirements in my document analysis, so I assume it is provided to the students verbally by their Capstone professor. One student provided this description of the portfolio: “I think essentially what it comes down to is that it is a portfolio that focuses on the beginner, intermediate, advanced. And then placing the competencies within those and using artifacts to justify or as supporting evidence for why you are in it. As well, as writing justifications for why you feel you are in those areas.” This description was provided to him by a faculty member or a fellow student but he could not remember who. Through the oral tradition, the students are encouraged constantly to prepare for the portfolio so they can provide a quality assessment of their learning experience while in the program. This is what one faculty member said.

We talk more specifically about how they are going to not verbalize, because it is not a verbal piece, but there is an online portfolio. How are you going to articulate these competencies? You know, the first year, I am constantly reminding them, are you saving everything? Save everything? You want to save hard copies; you want to save electronic copies. Save everything. Second years I am like are you reflecting on that, because you might want to put it in your portfolio. When it comes time to do that in March, don’t tell me that you did not work on it all year. These are the things that you should be prepping for so that you are ready to put that together, very seamlessly, very easily when it is due. And you should not be waiting for the night before.

Though still unsure of what they are supposed to look like, the students I interviewed heard from some second year students that they could be fun. A faculty member provided me with a few examples, and I was able to see how a student could be creative and fun while still providing a quality assessment of his or her experience.

### ***Assessment Results***

Using the fourth component of the assessment framework by Huba and Freed (1999), I researched if and how the CSP program at BGSU is using the assessment results to improve

overall learning of the graduate students in the program. Through my document analysis and interviews, I found that there was informal, decentralized assessment occurring and there was a desire to have more formal and quantitative assessment created.

Faculty members were quick to point out that students and supervisors communicated with them when there were issues with particular courses, internship sites, or practicum sites. Because most of the faculty members have been around for a while at BGSU, faculty can usually figure out if the problem is related to one new individual or if it is a larger systemic issue. The faculty members also spoke to me about making slight changes in the CSP 6890 course based on the dynamics or characteristics of the group. The small group format in the 6890 course allows the faculty members to be more nimble and respond to feedback or the self evaluation results that come back each semester in order to provide the educational experiences their students need.

When asked how they thought assessment results were used, the students in the focus group were unsure. They were not even using their own semester by semester evaluations to provide a comprehensive view of their development over time. Similar to the students, the supervisors were unsure how assessment results were used by faculty members. When asked explicitly, one supervisor had this to say, “I have not personally participated in any evaluation and I can’t really even tell you what that might look like right now.” Even though the supervisors believed that they have never changed any of their experiences or internships based on assessment data from the competency model, all of the ones interviewed did speak to making informal changes based on the conversations they had with their interns over time. As mentioned earlier, one supervisor did create an original rubric to use with graduate students. This was seemingly developed to advance learning based on past discussions and an area of need.

Faculty members were the only ones that could speak to the area of formal assessment

results of the program based on competency model and their common agreement that they needed more. When asked about using assessment results, one faculty member spoke very openly about the need for improvement in that area.

I would say that we definitely have room to strengthen that. We ought to be capturing more data for our assessment purposes. You know, having, setting up survey monkey for students to do that throughout the program. I have to turn in an assessment report this week. We have not captured that data really in any meaningful way. I could easily write one of your implications of practice. And that assessment piece would be part of that and strengthening that link between the academic program and the supervisors in terms of how to incorporate that. So I was already planning to do that with the competency form and I was thinking as I talked to you that I will change the evaluation form.

This data is not only important for advancing learning, but also important for programs when looking at accreditation standards or performance budgeting. If the data can show that students are developing and learning, programs can answer questions of effectiveness and quality.

However, one professor was quick to point out that self-reported data can have pitfalls. “What we have found over here as we aggregate the data is that most of the students come in thinking they have a pretty good handle on all of these things and they leave rating themselves lower than what they had other the semesters. And um...for us to use it as program evaluation data, it would mean that oh my god they come here and we screw them up” (Faculty member).

Regardless of the data, whether informal or formal, qualitative or quantitative, faculty members agreed that more data needed to be mined for the betterment of the program, present students, and future students.

### ***Conclusion***

The CSP program at BGSU intentionally utilizes the ACPA/NASPA competency model to plan and develop experiences for graduate students and prepare them to be practitioners for the field. The faculty that I interviewed were aware of how the model could and should be used. The graduate students in the focus group were intrinsically-motivated individuals that wanted to

get the most of their graduate school experience; thus, they were very intentional and hard-working in reaching their competency goals. The supervisors valued developmental conversations and intentional planning. There did seem to be some communication breakdowns as faculty were much more knowledgeable about the model, the final portfolio, and evaluation pieces than supervisors or graduate students. Supervisors and graduate students emphasized the value in having more knowledge about those components in order to be more successful. Students also spoke of the clear differences in experiences that each student would have in the program based on the supervisor, the internship, the faculty advisor, the CSP 6890 cohort group, the Capstone course group, etc. Faculty members believed that the individual experiences are important because each individual is different, and that the competency model was adopted in part to provide some sort of standards for graduates of the program. However, one faculty member was very clear in pointing out that it is only a “tool” and no one should ever “treat it as an end all, be all.”

## **Colorado State University**

### ***Introduction***

This section on the Student Affairs and Higher Education Program at Colorado State University describes the creation, implementation, and utilization of a competency model to build and enhance learning experiences for graduate students. First, the Student Affairs in Higher Education program is described including the basic curriculum. Second, I provide a historical look at how the competency model was created and how it evolved over the years. Next, I discuss how students and their supervisors are educated about and trained on the competency model and its supplemental documents. The fourth section covers the portfolio course that students are required to take each semester. Intentionality and deliberate use of the competency model is the topic of the fifth section. Next, I speak to how the student-advisor relationship influences the student experience and is part of the competency model. The seventh section involves the evaluation processes utilized by the program to evaluate and advance students along the model. Section eight is about the portfolio as the final assessment piece for the competencies and each student's experience. Finally, I discuss how the program collects and utilizes overall assessments results of the competency model to advance learning of all students.

### ***SAHE Program***

Colorado State University is a land-grant institution and Carnegie Research University located in Fort Collins, Colorado. The Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) program is designed for students seeking careers in student affairs and higher education administration in a college setting. The SAHE program provides a Master of Science degree and requires 45 credit hours for completion of the degree. Besides the core content courses completed, students within each cohort take the EDRM 698 course together each semester. These courses sequentially are

referred to as Portfolio I, Portfolio II, Portfolio III, and Portfolio IV. Students are also required to complete two different one-hour elective credit courses from a list of options.

Though the practical experience is an emphasis of this program, students are not required to have an assistantship. It is highly encouraged, however. All students with the 25-30 hour per week assistantships receive in-state tuition and are provided a monthly stipend so the monetary benefits motivate most full-time students to obtain an assistantship. Assistantships occur in a variety of functional areas including, but not limited to, orientation and transition programs, residence halls, Greek life, campus leadership, campus recreation, and student leadership, involvement, and community engagement.

The SAHE program at Colorado State prides itself in the diversity of its students. The program provides this description of its student population.

Our students come from across the United States and from other countries. All students bring with them a variety of background experiences, perspectives, strengths, and share an interest in learning and experiencing more related to field of student affairs. The paths that bring students to our program are numerous; some are directly out of their undergraduate programs, others come from entry level positions in the field, while some may have been employed in the field or a similar field for a number of years prior.

Due to its strong national and international reputation, the program attracts a large pool of candidates, but only invites about 45 candidates to campus to interview for the 22-24 candidates in each cohort group. The SAHE program usually has about 45 total full-time students enrolled. There are also a small number of part-time students enrolled each year in the program.

There is one practical component to the program that is required. For a total of four credit hours, students must complete two different practicum experiences. Students must spend 30 hours in the practicum experience for every credit hour received so they spend 60 hours each in two different experiences. These practicum experiences occur in all different types of offices and departments in the university or at outside institutions.

An important aspect of the program is that the faculty members are also full-time practitioners, or administrators, at the university. These individuals “combine academic preparation within the field with practical day-to-day knowledge of the operation of a university” (SAHE Program, 2011, p. 1). There is one tenured faculty member in the program, James Banning, but he is currently in the process of retiring. There are about 30 faculty members who teach in the program and each faculty member usually only teaches one course. David McKelfresh serves as the program chair of the SAHE program and he takes on a lot of the decision-making for the program. However, there are also standing committees for decision-making like the curriculum committee that includes some five faculty members from the program. Some courses are co-taught by more than one faculty member and most of the faculty members have director positions or above in the institution or neighboring institutions. There are a handful of faculty members that still are in entry-level positions that are co-teaching courses. Many respondents spoke to the benefit of having faculty members also being practitioners. One faculty member said:

There is a familiarity that happens when you are working with practitioners. Students could be in a committee meeting with a person who is a faculty member one part of the day. That night, they may be responding to a campus crisis and that same person is the Assistant Director of Housing and Dining and they are helping them respond to a student or campus crisis. Then the next day, they may be in class with that person. So they get to know them in ways that they may not in other places.

Only about 12 of the faculty members are formal advisors for the graduate students and to be an advisor one must have a PhD. Each advisor only has about 3-4 total students to advise; one or two in each cohort.

### ***Competency Model Creation and Evolution***

The SAHE program has been practitioner-based since its inception in 1967. Since the beginning, its faculty members have also been full-time administrators at the institution or

neighboring institutions. However, the final assessment piece for the program was a thesis or a professional paper. Around 2003, conversations began to occur between faculty members about credentialing and professional standards. Linda Kuk, the Vice President of Student Affairs at the time, started the conversation because she knew that credentialing was a hot topic in NASPA and within the general field of student affairs. Other faculty members also saw the importance of the competencies as well. One faculty member discussed how those conversations led to discussion about competencies.

So starting to think about what sorts of knowledge, and skills, and competencies do you need to have to be an effective student affairs practitioner and I was coming at it from the angle of sometimes we will get someone into our program and they are doing well academically, but it doesn't seem like a very good fit in terms of personal qualities or skills or ability to actually do the work? And we didn't really have a way to assess whether this student could actually do the work. They might be great in the classroom, but not necessarily out in the field. And then at the same time, I don't remember who was discussing, but the mismatch between our curriculum and the thesis requirement. Our program is very practitioner focused and the classes are very intentional and then we have this thesis thrown on without a lot of support from the faculty.

The faculty agreed to put together the competency model, which will be discussed in full later.

Linda Kuk, Blanche Hughes, a faculty member and current Vice President of Student Affairs, and Jody Donovan, faculty member and current Dean of Students, collaborated to create the original model.

Several other pieces also were important to the evolution of the model. One was the portfolio. Kris Barnard, was a faculty member in the program in the mid 2000s, and was simultaneously completing her PhD at the University of Denver. She had a portfolio requirement for her doctoral program at Denver and started conversations to bring the portfolio over to Colorado State University. Kris worked with Jody Donovan to adapt the DU portfolio format to meet the SAHE master's level requirements and implement it into the SAHE program in 2007. The Colorado State portfolio guidelines document still references and thanks the University of



Denver for providing the original framework. The portfolio replaced the thesis and /or final paper as the final assessment measure for the program. This transition to the portfolio was important as faculty members were not happy with the final assessment. One faculty member pointed out that all faculty members agreed that there was a disconnect between the curriculum and the final assessment. The program needed a better way of evaluating the potential success of graduates.

You know, it was like it was all of this practitioner stuff and then there was just this disconnect...for some students, actually for most students. Umm..okay now I got to write this paper, how does it really fit with what I have been doing. So we worked really hard to say lets write about something or do something that is meaningful to you as you go out and work. And it just became more difficult to do that..you know, it was just a mismatch. So we thought there has got to be something else that would be a better indication of our competencies of our students to go out and work in the field.

The SAHE program has a curriculum committee comprised of a few faculty members. In 2007, the committee led an effort of faculty, assistantship supervisors, and graduate students to revise the original competency model created in 2003. The changes made by the committee were not drastic, but rather small refinements to modernize the model and remain somewhat similar to models of the professional associations. A faculty member from that committee provided some insight into the process: “since we had been doing the competencies for about four years, we wanted to say okay, what kind of updates do we need to do? We really made some small and minor changes. We added one; we may have taken one out. We have essentially kept most of the things in place, but we wanted to make sure we were taking stock of how we were doing and keeping up with the times.”

Finally, the SAHE program also changed the structure of the EDRM 698 course that students take each semester. Judy Muenchow, faculty member in the SAHE program, asked for and was given the sole charge of teaching all of the EDRM 698 courses. Before she was given

control over all of the courses, different faculty members taught the course each semester. Judy thought that inconsistency of faculty members hindered the students' success with the portfolios and limited any sense of continuation from semester to semester. One of her goals was to provide more linkage to the competency model and the final portfolio requirement. This portfolio requirement will be discussed in full later.

One faculty member was quick to point out that the model is always being evaluated either formally or informally. I asked faculty members if they ever had the discussion of adopting the ACPA/NASPA competency model and moving away from the model currently being used by the SAHE program. All respondents were happy with their current model, but still thought that they could adapt the model to make sure no pieces were missing compared to the model of the professional associations. One faculty member said that “we should start seriously looking at how we can make sure that.....there are some things in the ACPA/NASPA competencies that we are not covering and we are not there yet, but that is going to be one of this year's conversations for us”

### ***Competency Model***

The competency model utilized by the SAHE program at Colorado State University includes both knowledge competencies and professional practice competencies. Students must be able to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and awareness in all of the competencies identified. The full model is included in appendix C. The knowledge competencies area is broken down into two areas: applied foundational knowledge and professional knowledge. Competencies under both areas include assessment and evaluation, student learning, legal issues, and diversity. The professional practice competencies area is broken down into five broader competencies of administrative functions and processes, managing self, communication, working relationship

with others, and mobilizing innovation and change. Within each of these five broad areas are more specific abilities that students must demonstrate. For example, under the administrative functions and processes area, students must demonstrate the ability to meet deadlines and produce quality results.

As I mentioned earlier, most faculty members are happy with the current model. They believe that there could be pieces that are different from the model of the professional associations, specifically the competency model created by ACPA/NASPA. However, they believe that the model fits the program and so they feel that they can provide the experiences in order for students to obtain the identified competencies.

Well, we certainly want them to meet their competencies and through their coursework and through their assistantship, we feel like they certainly should be able to do that. Every student is going to advance along that at different paces and they will reach certain....some of them will advance on others where others will make slower progress or that sort of thing. So we don't have an expectation about how quickly that should happen or how much that should happen but we do want to be able to say and want them to be able to say, when you do graduate, you have met these competencies.

One critical point is that the assistantships are not required in this program. This does create a problem for the students that do not have an assistantship, though nearly all full-time students do have one. Another faculty member provided a similar positive view of the competency model. She thought that the competencies included in the model were correct. She believed that it was other factors, mainly the individuals involved that influence the success of the model.

No, the competency model....the competencies are correct. It is what you do with that model; it is the people, in my opinion. I really don't have an issue with...I think the competencies are well thought out. I do think that we can tweak them every once in awhile and we have done one major tweak since they were developed. And I think we will probably be ready for another one in a couple more years. Things change in higher education and how you are preparing students.

I asked supervisors the same questions regarding whether the competency model encompasses all of the necessary competencies and if students are successful achieving all of the

identified competencies. Supervisors thought that the competency model definitely helped hold the students accountable to the professional standards and to taking their experiences seriously.

A common theme that came up was that the success of the student often depended on internal characteristics such as self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, work ethic, and time management.

Similarly, two different supervisors and a faculty member reported that managing the self competency was the competency area in which students struggled the most. One supervisor had this to say about how confidence affected his graduate students' performance.

I think that their personal and professional confidence is something as a supervisor is hard to evaluate, because I think that there is a trend that students come in with a certain degree of confidence and then it drops off immediately. And then it is kind of slowly building back up. So how do I assess that? Do I say well, you don't have enough confidence? Well, that is not going to help them, you know what I mean.

A faculty member had similar thoughts about the links between personal characteristics and performance. She spoke of a growing trend of students struggling in the program and she thinks that most of the reasons for struggle are the same historically: poor academic preparation and personal struggles. "What is compounded by that is having the people who are admitted, who are marginal admits, and they have personal issues, self issues. Compound that with not really being ready for graduate level study and that compounds their situation" (Faculty member). One supervisor saw the students' success with the competency model as contingent on effort regardless of ability or personal struggles. She believed that students can be very successful in the program because of the competency model if they work hard and use it properly, but that means having more structure and making sure that the portfolio is completed with intentionality and forethought.

You know, I struggle with the competencies piece. I think that the hard part is for some of our students; they really take it seriously and are working on it on a consistent base. And then some of our students, are oh...I need to set a defense date so let me cram it all in. So I don't know if it is truly effective or not effective or not from that standpoint. So I

think there could be some things that are done differently in that regard, to make sure that it is happening on a consistent basis.

Students, on the other hand, had nothing but good things to say about the competency model, itself. They believed that it was a great tool for them as they tried to develop themselves into student affairs professionals. All of the students in the focus group felt that they could achieve all of the identified competencies through their assistantships, coursework, and practica. When asked if they were achieving more of their competencies through the coursework or through out-of-the classroom experiences, students could not definitively say one or the other, but believed it could depend on the individual student. One student said, “I think it depends because they are broken down into knowledge bases and a professional. So a majority of the knowledge ones come from classes and a majority of the professional ones come from our assistantships and practicum. There are some overlaps for sure.” Another student spoke of the nice clear separation between knowledge and professional practice competencies. He said that the program allows the student the freedom to use all the experiences and then reflect on and demonstrate how their individual experiences fit.

I think that that is the nice thing about it. It allows us the flexibility to perceive where we think we are achieving them. Some of those knowledge competencies, we could be getting them and probably are from our practical experiences, but if we feel more strongly tied to those, we could use those as evidence that we are meeting those competencies. That is what is kind of nice about it. I definitely feel that I am gaining knowledge from my practical experiences, it is just, how I am meeting it.

There was no consensus by the students on any one competency area that was harder than others to achieve. One student spoke of a struggle in getting assessment experience. “We have a research course first semester and then we do program evaluation course this semester. But outside of those two classes, I am not doing research. And that sometimes feels weird because we are in graduate school. A lot of programs are heavy research based so it is a little bit harder.”

The other students were getting research and assessment experience in their assistantships so this student was probably not the norm.

In the end, the students I met with spoke of how the competency model and the portfolio were motivators to their success. However, they also spoke of their own intrinsic desire to have the necessary skills and knowledge to be strong student affairs professionals. One student spoke of the desire to obtain the competencies regardless of the required portfolio, especially the competencies that she thought would be important in the functional area of student affairs that she wants to pursue. “There are some that I literally have to do them for my portfolio, but then I know what kind of areas I want to work in when I graduate and seeking out those competencies are very important for me...I will use them, but these other ones will be way more important for me to have. So like teaching and advising, way more important to me than like legal or ethical stuff.” Other students agreed with this assessment of the usefulness of the competency model. They believed that it helped insure that graduates of the program would be ready to obtain jobs and be successful in the field. This student was very happy with what the competency model provided to him.

I am pretty confident that when it is time we are ready to go out there and say we have met these competencies, I think we will all be able to say that very confidently. I think like I said...we all bring a lot of different interests and things like that so some of us are going to be higher in other places and lower in other places, but I think the baseline for all of us will be matched...We are going to bring a lot of different stuff, strengths and such. But the minimum that the program is promising us to receive, I think we are definitely meeting that.

### ***Education on the Competency Model***

The competency model is marketed to prospective students before they set foot on campus as a benefit of the program. The model and the portfolio as a culminating project are discussed during interview days on campus to interviewing candidates as well. One student

spoke of how attractive the competency model was to her.

What struck me the most was that there are professional competencies and for me those are practical and the program was marketed as practitioner-based, but knowing that I was going to get to do more practical stuff and it was just as important as the things I was learning in class, that was probably one of the biggest reasons that I liked this program. The things that I do outside of school are significantly more important to me than what I am learning in class. I get to practice all day every day what I am learning and that is a first for me. Because in undergrad, you don't get to go out and practice psychology on people.

Other students also remembered the competency model and portfolio being discussed at the interview weekend and again at orientation when they arrived on campus their first semester.

One student spoke of his focus on the portfolio more than the competencies, though.

I think that more of the concept that I understood is that the end product was a portfolio and not so much the competencies that were tied to the portfolio....What is the final product? Am I doing a thesis or I am doing a paper? But it was not so much what goes into that. So the competencies...or the portfolio is built around the competencies...the product was more tangible and conceptually easier to understand of the two. Because when they showed it to us, it was like oh, you put in artifacts and things like that. It was okay, that is for my portfolio. It was not so much...I did not make the connection. I am confident that they did, but I can't remember it.

After they arrive on campus, students agreed that they hear about it as a collective group most in their EDRM 698 course. Each student also speaks about the competencies and the portfolio to various lengths and extents with their advisor and/or supervisor. This differs by student, advisor, and supervisor. Regardless, the amount of discussion about the competencies and the portfolio picks up between the student and advisor as the student nears graduation and the final defense of the portfolio. One student provided me with her experience learning about the model.

I think that we are also educated on it during our portfolio class, which is our general SAHE class to make sure that we are accomplishing everything that we need to...and also with more personal conversations with our advisors and with our supervisors. I know for me personally, my supervisor has really challenged me to reflect on the competencies and how I am going about meeting each one since day one. Even in this semester, I am involved in a lot outside my assistantship so he recommended that I list everything that I

am doing and come up with specific goals and actionable items and timelines for how I am meeting specific competencies with each of these involvement opportunities. So that is just something that I think because it has been made more of a priority by my advisor and supervisor, it is more on my mind I think.

Faculty agreed with this perception of how students are learning about the competency model. One faculty member was quick to point out that it is a “joint responsibility” by the faculty members and the entire program to educate the students in order to help them be successful with the competency model. Another faculty member provided this assessment about the education process and her point of view on how the model caters to each individual student.

We review it in the orientation process and I know that [Judy Muenchow] touches on it in the portfolio classes and I think as much as we set it up as a joint adventure, I think it sort of depends on the student, who takes the lead. If the student is not as forthcoming or proactive in their relationship with their advisor, the advisor might be the one to say, okay, let’s pull out the checklist and look at this. But other students, you know, will say I have done all of these things, let’s have a conversation. That is another piece of the SAHE program; it is pretty adaptable to different student styles.

The supervisors I interviewed reported some confusion regarding the competency model and the corresponding evaluation documents. Kacee Collard Jarnot is the assistantship coordinator for the SAHE program. Kacee holds meetings with the assistantship supervisors twice per semester to disseminate information and answer questions. Topics range from competencies to assistantships to discipline to graduation requirements. Kacee sits down with new supervisors one-on-one to “talk to them about competencies and just kind of general outlines of what the SAHE program looks like.” This also helps her develop a relationship with the supervisors so they know they can come to her with questions or concerns. The supervisors I interviewed had been in place for awhile and could not remember this one-on-one training. The supervisors also could not recall any continual formal discussion or formal training about the competencies. One supervisor talked about his perception of the competencies and the supervisor training and how supervisors are supposed to be educated on what to do.



I don't think these are talked about there, but you are reminded about the evaluation that you are supposed to. And I remember the first time that I did that evaluation in fall of 2009, I went in and I was like, I have never seen any of these before. Now...to Kacee's credit, we are more organized with the supervisors' meetings. So I think that the document is sent out to supervisors and umm...I think the impetus is put on the graduate student, to bring that to their supervisor.

Based on my faculty, students, and supervisors I did interview, I think it is safe to assume that different supervisors have different levels of knowledge in regards to the competency model. The knowledge level of the supervisor could certainly influence the supervisor's ability to converse with the student about the model. There is also the small number of students who do not have an assistantship. Most of them are working full-time somewhere, hopefully in a higher education setting. One can assume that most of the intentional one-one-one conversations for these students are happening with their advisor.

In the end, I found that the faculty members and students seemed to be pretty well-versed on the competency model so the supervisor knowledge level of the model was not as important. However, the supervisors wanted or needed more information to help their students be successful with the model. Increasing education for the supervisors could only increase the chances of success for the students.

### *Portfolio Classes*

The EDRM 698 course, or Portfolio course, provides the cohort with some consistency throughout the two years in the SAHE program. It is taken each semester by the entire cohort and is informally referred to sequentially as Portfolio I, Portfolio II, Portfolio III, and Portfolio IV. Judy Muenchow, faculty member in the SAHE program and the Executive Director of Campus Recreation, teaches all of these courses. One faculty member described the portfolio courses in this way, "I think those portfolio classes are as you say...the glue." As mentioned earlier, Judy took sole control over the all sections of the course in 2008 to add some sense of intentionality.

She described the course in this way. “It was the kitchen sink, mixmaster, anything that didn’t fit in a class, to presenting theory, the Kolb theory, was something that was going on. It was really a melting pot of student affairs. It could have been anything and everything.” She knew that some of the content was correct, but was concerned of the overlap and the disconnect between each section and each faculty member. One faculty member agreed with her assessment and provided this perspective: “So I don’t know that anybody was really, because it was taught by different people, if they were having the right number, and types, and levels of conversation. You know, what are you doing, and you doing, and you doing? And certainly the components of the portfolio were involved in all three, but it was so fragmented from an outside perspective.” Judy saw some benefit in taking over the course and then allowing other faculty members and advisors to focus on other important pieces. She sees herself as the central disseminator for important pieces of information for all students.

I am going to do it if I can do them all and I can tie them together and if I can bring some continuity and relate it to the content, what I refer as the content courses of the program. So that there is tie in with the content and advisors because I cannot be seen as the advisor for 42 to 44 students because a lot of the things in the portfolio courses that I talk about are actually requirements of the school of education and the graduate school. And it brought some continuity and consistency so the advisors did not have to worry about is this the semester that you file this form, you know what I mean, that sort of thing. They could concentrate on actually advising the student either with the assistantship, the cohort, or their academics...

Besides speaking about the portfolio and competencies, other academic pieces and professional development opportunities are covered in the EDRM 698 courses. Some topics include research skills, libraries, academic writing, interview skills, and job placement. Panels and speakers are often brought into the classroom to discuss certain subjects. For example, Lance Wright, who coordinates the practicum experiences for the SAHE program, comes into the Portfolio I course every fall. He speaks to students about the requirements and available

opportunities associated with the practica.

The structure and intentionality of the portfolio class is important to the faculty members as well. The faculty and advisors appreciate having someone who speaks to the students about requirements and deadlines. Knowing that each student might have a different advisor and a different supervisor, one advisor spoke of the benefit of having one common disseminator of information.

Judy, in the portfolio class, makes sure that all of those things, in terms of forms, deadlines, reflections, you name it, are getting done. So our experiences as advisors are that students come to us having finished these projects through the portfolio class, ready to talk about reflections. Letting us know that they have taken care of these deadlines. So we really are pleased with the portfolio class helps keep folks on track.

I asked students of their perceptions of this portfolio course and there were mixed reviews.

Students appreciated the structure piece of it and knowing that they will get the important program information from a trusted source. One student said, “I like the structure piece of it. The instructors have been very intentional about these are the dates we are meeting and this is when assignments are due. Meeting minutes are sent out if announcements are made in class or whatever.” However, another student said that she felt that some course content was useless to her. She thought that it was geared towards the students who needed extra accountability. “My very honest answer is that the information we get in it could be sent to us over email. I know how to manage myself. Other people need that to stay on track. So I get why I go to that class. I don’t feel like I go and am like, why, why, why? I don’t feel like that, but I could very much do it myself.”

Another complaint from students was that the course met inconsistently. The syllabus lists regular meetings and Judy stated that for the most part each semester the class gradually meets less. Basically, Portfolio I meets every week, Portfolio II meets every other week,

Portfolio III meets every third week, and Portfolio IV meets only three times the whole semester.

One supervisor provided an outside perspective on the EDRM 698 courses.

A lot of them when they talk about the portfolio class, they will say I am not sure really why it exists because we don't meet on a consistent basis. That time is scheduled but they will say, we are not going to meet this week, I am not really sure why...So I don't know if it is being beneficial or not. So in the beginning, I know it is, because they will say oh, it is great to have an idea of what we are talking about when we talk about the portfolio. And they do that during their SAHE orientation when they first get here, but it seems like their comments to me that is kind of a hit or miss class so....

Judy stated that there was some intentionality behind meeting less often each subsequent semester as she turns over more responsibility to the student to complete their responsibilities. In her self-described "linear way of thinking", she provides more structure in the beginning to support the new student and then less in the end as the student nearing graduation has to learn to take self-initiative. When asked about the structure of the portfolio course meetings, one supervisor provided a similar view.

I think with that structure piece, what I see again from the outside and listening to what they have to say is that that first year is very structured and very course heavy and then their second year it is not as much. So then they tend to kind of be chill and it is not until a month into it that they go, oh! We have our first assignment due. I totally forgot about it, because it was different then the first semester where they are just hit consistently and then second semester it is a little more laidback for them.

This supervisor's perspective relays how the intentional style of the Portfolio courses does force students to learn through experiences and challenges them to take responsibility for their own education.

### ***Intentional Planning and Experiences***

Intentionality is a word that was used by everyone I met with in the SAHE program at Colorado State University. Faculty members want intentional planning and intentional experiences for the students of the program. I found as I met with faculty members, supervisors, and students, that intentionality was more than just a word. It is a practice and a focus. The

competency model provides a tool for intentional planning for each individual student. One student appreciated the way that the competency model enabled her to cater the program to her own strengths and desires.

I think each of one of us has had a very different experience in the SAHE program, based on our assistantships, our practicum, and our involvement opportunities. So I think there is kind of a sense of accountability with the competencies, that we are all meeting these specific requirements, but in different ways. And I think that is a really unique way of looking at that, because this program caters to the unique interests of the individual. So it shows that there are very many different, there are other ways....there are different paths throughout the SAHE program, but we have all had that common experience in those regards.

One faculty member spoke of how the competency model and intentional planning helps students customize the program. The model allows the student, through discussion with their advisor, to purposefully select the right opportunities. "It is really to have them tailor their experience and customize their experience while they are here. So it might be, I want to learn about admissions. Or it might be, I want to learn about holistic review of applications in admissions.....So it is really kind of up to them and their advisor together to put that together."

The supervisor is also an important part of this deliberate competency model according to the students, the faculty members, and the supervisors, themselves. One student talked about how her supervisor used gaps in her experiences based on the model to have her seek out further opportunities.

I think that I have had to search outside of that, but I think that my supervisor was clear in being able to make those opportunities within or supporting me in looking outside. If the assistantship with the students is not really.....like I don't have supervision in my assistantship. I am an advisor to a group and I also advise a fraternity. There is nothing that is built into that technically, but he is more than happy....we talked about hiring a student and letting me have the opportunity to supervise someone. Or he provided me opportunities or suggested areas that I can actually go supervise a student.

A supervisor provided me with a similar description of the intentionality behind the model and the program. She spoke to me about her assistantship and the conversations she has with her

graduate students so they know what experiences they will not get through the assistantships.

That graduate students then can plan out how to get the experiences they need. This same supervisor also said that other supervisors discuss the importance of these intentional conversations during their supervisor meetings that were discussed earlier.

And for me it is a conversation with [the graduate student] now to say this isn't something that you are really going to get in this assistantship so you have to look at practicums and other opportunities to get that experience...So those conversations are happening in different assistantships and we meet as assistantship supervisors a few times each semester to then kind of talk about those things and in the beginning of that semester it is always the, okay, you need to sit down and have that conversation with your students about what competencies can they get. What will they miss? How can you help them get the other competencies that they need, that kind of stuff.

That is not to say that every supervisor is having strong intentional conversations with the students. All of the supervisors and students I met with spoke of having those discussions and being part of intentional planning. A few of them said that some supervisors struggled with the intentionality piece. One supervisor told me that when supervisors struggle, she believes it is due to investment.

I think that I have a strong commitment to it and I think because of that, that piece is there. And so even in talking with my peers, they are like, why are you doing this? Why are you giving them goals, it is not part of the competencies? You know, why are you meeting with them every week, we only meet with them once a month. You know, all of those pieces. And to me...that is my job. So if I am not giving them what they need, I am not doing my job.

I asked this supervisor if support is given to the students who might be struggling with a specific supervisor. She thought that the community as a whole supports all of the students and she also added that the student has an advisor for support. The students reported that each advisor-student relationship is very different, but that the student-advisor relationship is a very important part of the intentionality. One student described his meetings with his advisor as having "many, many intentional conversations about competencies."

### ***Student-Advisor Relationship***

Graduate students spend considerable time with their advisors throughout their two years in the program. The advisor may wear many different hats in the relationship with the student including but not limited to, mentor, guide, counselor, friend, coach, challenger, and disciplinarian. With each advisor only having 3-4 student advisees, a lot of time and effort can be spent on developing relationships. One faculty member stated plainly that there is a benefit of having such a personal-focused program, “they get as much attention as they want, our students.” As mentioned just previously, each relationship also can take a different form. The student or the advisor can be the driver in the relationship based on personality styles. One faculty member said this about students in their relationship with their advisor, “it is very personal with your advisor and things like that but it is also what works best for your style. If you need deadlines, if you are good with deadlines, then you can do it yourself.”

In order to create some uniformity, the SAHE program has a checklist document for the competency model, portfolio requirements, and general program requirements. This checklist has the items that need to be discussed and/or completed by the advisor and student. It is separated by semester. Some of the items are general discussion topics such as graduate school transition issues, academic interests, or assistantship struggles. Other items are specific requirements that must be completed within the semester it is listed. Two examples for the second semester are that the student must “meet with advisor to compare competency evaluations and review feedback from first semester faculty and assistantship/work supervisors” and “schedule your preliminary portfolio committee meeting prior to the end of second semester.” The checklist is a comprehensive document that both the student and the advisor are responsible for following to make sure that the student stays on track to meet requirements and matriculate through the

program towards graduation. The students spoke highly of the checklist and how it keeps them on process so they are not scrambling in the end to create the portfolio and prepare for the defense. One student spoke of how his advisor is good at talking about competencies, but he also knows that some responsibility should be placed on the students as well.

I think that the faculty and advisors do a really good job because since we got here, that was the first thing that was told us. We have a portfolio and competencies to think about it. Whenever I meet with my advisor, we talk about it, which ones are missing, and you do have some missing, then what can we do to get them. I haven't been to a defense, but I heard that they actually ask questions about each one of them. And if you are smart enough, I think that you would get ready for that.

One supervisor spoke of how some responsibility is put on the student, but that it is nice to have such knowledgeable advisors since many of the new students are unsure of what they should be doing. This supervisor appreciated that the advisors are having the same intentional conversations about additional experiences and practica with the student, so the student is hearing it from more than just the supervisor. "I think their advisor is intentional with these, that helps a lot. Just the advisor knowing what questions to ask, but also the reality is for a lot of our SAHE students, they are not going to get all of these in their assistantship so how does their advisor connect them to the right practicum opportunities, the right summer experience, you know what I mean."

I asked students, supervisors, and faculty members if students ever change advisors. The occurrence is rare, but it does happen. One faculty member, who also serves as one of the advisors, provided me with the message that she gives to students about changing advisors.

I say, there is no negativity associated with changing advisors, but I say, however, and we relate it back to the profession all of the time. I don't necessarily like every boss I have had, but I have to find a way to work with them and get the best out of the situation. So before you think about changing your advisors, you have to think long and hard about what you are getting out of this. What are you bringing to it? Is that why you are getting what you get out of it? Or is it really, really, you are just not a good fit. You need more or less from your advisor. I mean there could be people that are bowled over by me as an



advisor and they just need someone that is more relaxed.

The student-advisor relationship is key part of the students' experience in the SAHE program at Colorado State University. The relationship can be impactful on how the student approaches the competency model with intentionality and seeks out experiences to maximize growth.

### ***Evaluation Process of Competency Model***

The formal evaluations completed throughout the program are part of the intentional, overall evaluation and assessment process that connect to the competency model. The student is evaluated from three different stakeholders: the supervisor, the faculty advisor, and the self. The student is also evaluated every semester in order to provide continual feedback and keep the student on track with meeting the competencies and matriculating towards graduation. This ongoing evaluation process also helps prepare the student for the final assessment piece which is the defense of the portfolio. One faculty member had this to say about the evaluation process: "there is a cohesive sense to evaluating the competencies as well, because every semester we look at every competency and evaluate them ourselves on whether or not we feel we are meeting them and then provide specific examples."

The evaluation process is very fluid. Through the EDRM 698 course in their first fall semester, the students start reflecting on their own strengths and challenges and where they are in terms of the competency model. At the completion of the first semester, they are asked to complete the self evaluation regarding the competencies. This self evaluation looks at each of the competency areas and asks the student to rate himself or herself on a scale of one to five. They must also provide comments for rationale. Students reported to me that the evaluations are very subjective and dependent on how they are feeling at the time about their assistantship, the program, and themselves. One student said this, "it is reflective in my evals like am I feeling

confident in myself or not confident in myself and that is totally reflective.”

Some students reported talking to their supervisor about their self evaluations, others did not. The supervisor completes a similar evaluation rubric on the student regarding the competencies each semester. Some students also reported speaking with their supervisor about this supervisor evaluation, while others did not. This supervisor evaluation is completed online and the information is provided to the faculty advisor to cover with the student. One supervisor said that it is important that a supervisor discuss the evaluation with the student. This supervisor sees the competency model evaluation process as very important for their success. This supervisor also thinks the discussion of the ratings and the growth is more important than completing the evaluation.

I think it does, because I am not sure, without this, that everyone of them would meet it. I am positive that they wouldn't meet it...your first semester it is hard. So I always try to wait until December to try to evaluate it so then I have a couple months with them. But when they turn in their own, they are at 4s or 5s. Then when they see mine, and I am a hard grader and I know that, I am usually at a two or three. And so they will kind of look at it, so before I give it to them I will say, just so you know, I am a hard grader, and just so you know, I am grading what I have seen over the last five months and I want to be clear that my guess is that you are grading off of stuff that you did when you were a undergrad. And why don't we go through it and then I will say, does that make sense, the score I gave you? And they are like, yeah! I don't know like it, but I agree and so that means for me is that I need to improve more in that area.

Another supervisor agreed and spoke about how students are often caught up in the numbers of the ranking system. However, it is the comments that should be more important for the students.

I think it is hard because depending on who you talk to, some of them will say you know, I got a four but I learned a lot. Or I got a two, but I don't know why. And again, I would say that in the beginning because they are so competitive, it is about the number. But then being able to have that conversation with them to say, okay, you know what, if I just went through this and gave you all numbers, do you think that you would know what I meant by that number. Because how I score will be different than how so-and-so scores down the hallway. And how do you perceive that, and they are like, yeah, I guess I wouldn't know without the comments.

Another supervisor also spoke of the benefit of having more connection between the

advisor, student, and supervisor. This supervisor sees a split between what is happening in the assistantship and what is happening in the classroom. The evaluation process is supposed to integrate it all together, but this supervisor also wishes that a conversation could take place between everyone that is involved with each student.

They are seeing them in class and I am seeing them on a daily basis, so I think I probably have more insight into who they are as a person because I meet with them on a weekly basis and see them on a daily basis. So I am not just hearing about how they are doing academically, but I am hearing about how they are doing personally, how they are doing socially and all of those pieces play into it. And then how are they doing as being part of the cohort, so how do they show up in that space or not show up in that space. You know, what are they struggling with and do they feel like they can be genuine and authentic in classes and why or why not?

The most important piece of the evaluation process according to the faculty members is the integration of all of the evaluations by the faculty advisor, after the faculty advisor fills out an evaluation on the student as well. As part of the student-advisor checklist, the evaluations are discussed each semester and goals will be developed for the next semester based on the evaluation and the competencies. This process enables the program to cater to each individual student. One supervisor spoke very highly of the evaluation process and how it produces structure to lead up to the final assessment piece, the portfolio.

In the end, it's to prove the outcomes, the intended outcomes. Prove that you met them. I think that the way it is set up and the class work here and all of the checklists that they are supposed to go through, it is an accountability piece. Because that was talked about with some people of trying to increase some accountability so what we are producing is a better product. Students have met some outcomes, so there is some structure and accountability. Because the portfolios here are more than a final project, they cannot just do it the night before. They are supposed to be going along the way, and they have prelims the first year saying this needs to be done. So I see it here as more than a final defense.

### ***Portfolios***

Students in the SAHE program complete a comprehensive portfolio as their culminating project that evaluates students on the nine knowledge competencies and five professional

practice competencies. There are five distinct sections to the portfolio, and the competencies are integrated into each section. The first section is an introduction to the portfolio. This introduction includes an executive summary of the portfolio, a table of contents, a personal statement, a vita or resume, and the competency matrix. There is no uniform way of creating the competency matrix, but the purpose is for the student to identify which products, or experiences, match which identified competencies. One student had this to say about how he was going to put together his matrix.

I would say yeah, primarily, when I first started I took a product and then would see what matches it. The thing though that I think from the preliminary to now, I think we have made a lot of adjustments because when we first started we did not have as many artifacts or things like that to pull from. So we were trying to apply a lot of competencies to that one product. Now we have a lot more at least to say yes, this matches this. Or maybe a new product came along that better matches this. Things like that...I know that I personally have made a lot of adjustments to say what my artifacts meet. At this point, there are not as many and maybe there are better examples, too.

Section two of the portfolio is an essay of “reflections on the integration of coursework, practicum, and graduate assistantship you experienced during the full course of your program of study.” This essay is supposed to address all of the aforementioned experiences, as well as the student’s understanding of competencies. Section three documents all of the evidence to support the achieved competencies. For each competency, students provide a statement of reflection and then include the product related to the competency. The reflections may vary in length. One student had this to say about the reflections when asked how long they had to be. “It depends on what you are writing about. So my assistantships will be long reflections because they are very impactful to me. Maybe like my first paper will be like two pages. Because I wrote a paper, this is what it was about, and this is what I felt. Like I have nothing else to say.” For the knowledge competencies, frequent product examples include research papers, class presentations, and group projects. Product examples for the professional practice competencies might be supervision

topics, training presentations, assistantship projects, and organization culture analyses.

Section four of the portfolio is a reflection of performance reviews. This essay must integrate all of the competencies as the student reflects on his or her performance and academic assessments in the SAHE program. Finally, section five is the student's professional development plan for the future. In this section, students are asked to develop short term, five-year, and 10-year goals. They also must also speak to their leadership and service to the profession and the participation in scholarly and professional communication. Suggested products for this section include published articles, conference presentations, teaching experience reports, and documentation of any service to the profession.

The students complete a preliminary review of the portfolio in the second semester with their advisor and their committee. This preliminary review provides benchmarks and opportunities to give feedback to graduate students about their progress, as well as make sure that the graduate student is on track to graduate. Based on who the advisor is, each student had a little bit different experience, but in general students had to bring in two to four products for the preliminary review.

In the fourth semester, students in the program have the final defense of their portfolio. Students must pass this defense in order to graduate from the program. Students, who actually reach the defense, pass for the most part due to the accountability measures put up in place that have been mentioned earlier: preliminary review of the portfolio, advisor-student relationship, advisor-student checklist, EDRM 698 courses. I asked faculty members about the graduation rates and the response was that it is rare for someone to matriculate and not graduate after two years. The structure of the program, evaluation processes, and advisor-student relationships that have been previously discussed were all cited as accountability pieces to track progress and make

sure students are meeting requirements along the way.

Students and faculty members spoke of the different looks that the portfolio will take for each individual student. These differences are based on a lot of factors. One student said this: “There is a lot of personality that comes out of the portfolio. It is reflected in ourselves, or our advisor’s standpoint, or our committee’s standpoint.” Another student provided this insight into the creativity that a student uses in the portfolios.

Some portfolios have specific themes so for instance someone last year did a road trip theme for their portfolio and all of her reflections were Dear Mom and Dad this is what I did. So I think that it also depends too because some people write very direct and to the point, here is how I met this. That is going to be different than someone that appreciates creative writing and tries to tell a story. That may be a little longer. So I think it really caters to the individual.

In the end, the portfolio is the assessment piece to which students are supposed to describe their learning and growth. I asked the students if they saw the portfolio as an assignment or as the way to describe its true purpose, which is the competencies model. Students saw the portfolio in both ways. One student saw the worth of some of the competencies in her career plans, but there are other competencies that she completes just for the portfolio, and not for herself. “There are some that I literally have to do them for my portfolio, but then I know what kind of areas I want to work in when I graduate and seeking out those competencies is very important for me.” Two other students described it as a framework to guide them towards being good practitioners in the field. One student said this: “So having that as a guiding framework is helpful for my future. But I would say that it is both. Depending on how I am meeting those, meeting the competencies are not as meaningful to me, so in that regards, it is more for the portfolio. But there are some that I find a lot of value in and those are maybe for the future. I think a lot of it depends.” Faculty see the portfolio as important piece of a program based on competencies. One faculty member had this to say about having a portfolio as the culminating

project instead of a thesis. “You could have a thesis or a portfolio so to me the competencies are core to this program, this master’s degree. It is core to preparing these individuals to be a student affairs professional. It is the basis for criteria, the rubric, the portfolio rubric. It is the basis for the portfolio, but the portfolio is just reflective of a student affairs professional.”

### ***Assessment Leading to Improved Learning***

As part of the competency model and evaluation process, the SAHE program at CSU has access to overall assessment results of the competency model. These results could be used to improve overall learning of the graduate students in the program. Dave McKelfresh currently is the administrator for the StudentVoice tool. The StudentVoice tool collects the evaluation data from the respondents through an online platform. Kacee Collard-Jarnot assists Dave in coordinating this evaluation process with supervisors and students. Both individuals are able to export data files out of the StudentVoice tool that could be shared with faculty members, supervisors, and/or students. However, these results do not seem to be used in a formal process.

Most of the evaluation results were used in an informal ways. As mentioned earlier, the competency model had undergone some revisions in 2007. These revisions were based on qualitative results from portfolio defenses and an overall assessment of the experiences that the SAHE program provides. One faculty member had this to say when asked about ways that assessment results of the competency model were used to advance learning.

We don’t, when we say that we don’t do a lot, we don’t do the formal assessment of the program. The assessment is done, I think, with each class, and how they fit together. Some of the things that they are doing now, is what we do is every semester, any assignment and the due dates are given to everyone, students and faculty so we can see when the students are going to have a heavy load and when they are not...you know. And we have actually talked about, oh I can adjust one or I can adjust one...that sort of thing. So even on that support aspect, there is assessment going on, but it is just not formalized with...you know...a survey or groups or something.

Supervisors were unsure how any assessment results were used. When asked if they kept track of

results of their own graduate students and if any changes were made based on results, only one supervisor responded to the affirmative. This supervisor spoke to how the competencies have helped her tie in the in-class and out-of-class learning and force the student to engage in more productive educational conversations. After looking at the results, she would then reflect with the students about her perceptions.

I really believe that the competencies have allowed me to have more genuine and authentic conversations with my folks. To be able to say...you know...let's talk about your inclusive language, let's talk about your communication style, let's talk about all of those pieces whereas with the [thesis], I had no connection to that.....But umm...before that there wasn't an option to be like hey, okay, let's talk about your communication style, let's talk about your supervision style, let's talk about...you know. And those pieces weren't there so the only way that that got captured is because when we would do our own evaluation in [our department] of them, then we were able to capture it there, but that evaluation isn't even as specific as the competencies. And what I like about the competencies is it relates to both class and outside of class. And so both of those play a great role together.

The supervisors and students use an online tool to capture their evaluations each semester, as mentioned previously. This would logistically allow them to summarize the data of the student population in the program based on the competencies. Longitudinal reports by cohort, Analysis of specific competency areas, and analysis of assistantship areas all could be pulled to see if results need to influence decision-making. In discussion with faculty members, all agreed that this type of work and analysis needs to be done more, but the time has not been made to do so.

### ***Conclusion***

The Student Affairs and Higher Education program at Colorado State University uses a competency model to enhance the knowledge, skills, and experiences of students as they prepare for a career in student affairs. Through education, intentionality, the EDRM 698 courses, strong student-advisor relationships, a comprehensive evaluation process, and the final portfolio assessment piece, the SAHE program is able assist students in their efforts to achieve the



identified competencies. The SAHE program at Colorado State does have a lot of support pieces in place to help each student. However, one faculty member explained that even though there is a joint responsibility among advisors, supervisors, and the students to help each student succeed, some onus is placed on the student to take charge of their own success. In this faculty member's view the competency model creates a more challenging environment in the student affairs world that emphasizes support.

This is what we do in student affairs. I get that, we support the students, we go above and beyond, we want to make them successful and some students require more than others. But in a program of study, there is a point when the student has to be responsible and stand up and say, this is my responsibility and I am accountable to not meeting this deadline and not doing it fully or turning in a project or paper or whatever with very minimal...that does not meet the expectations of graduate work.

The students understand from the beginning that the competencies are important, the coursework is important, and their practical experiences are important. The competency model is threaded throughout each of the aspects of the program. This is done intentionally, because the faculty members believe that it will help the students be better prepared when they graduate from the program. One faculty advisor provided this description of how the competency model helps students at in the SAHE program be successful. "I think everything is related to the competencies. The whole degree is related to the competencies....I see it as really a full package and the competencies are the core and that is really how I approach it."

## Chapter 5

### Comparison and Analysis of Case Study Sites

This section of chapter four provides an opportunity to discuss the overall themes I found through my research across both case study sites. It also allows me to discuss the similarities and differences between the College Student Personnel Program at Bowling Green State University and the Student Affairs in Higher Education Program at Colorado State University. Figure Four is a comparison between the CSP Program at Bowling Green State University and the SAHE program at Colorado State University in regards to their competency models and their relative program characteristics. The models and the program characteristics were discussed previously in Chapter Four.

The first theme that I found is that there are more similarities than differences between the specific competencies identified within each model. Furthermore, I found that similarities between the two programs in what competencies students struggled to achieve and what competencies students achieved easily. The second theme is that the two programs used different language for the evaluation tools and evaluated the students differently when it came to acquiring and developing competencies. Next, I will compare the assessment process of the competencies of the two programs. Fourth, I will look at the theme of the individual student versus the social environment and how they interact.. The fifth theme is education and communication. Finally, I will discuss the use of overall assessment results of the competency model by both programs.

***Figure 4 – Comparison of Competency Models and Relative Program Characteristics***

<b>Bowling Green State (ACPA/NASPA)</b>	<b>Colorado State</b>
Advising and Helping	Knowledge Competencies
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)	Organizational and leadership theories
Equity, Diversity & Inclusions	Assessment, evaluation, methodology
	Legal, contractual, and liability issues.
	Cross-cultural and diversity related issues

Ethical Professional Practice History, Philosophy & Values Human & Organizational Resources Law, Policy & Governance Leadership Personal Foundations Student Learning & Development	Higher education systems and history Diverse student learning and development Student diverse characteristics and demographics Standards and professional ethical standards. Current issues and practices in the student affairs  Professional Practice Competencies Administrative Functions and Processes Managing Self Communication Working Relationship with Others Mobilizing Innovation and Change
Small Advising Groups Each Semester	One Large Portfolio Course Each Semester
Reflections and Self-Evaluations Each Semester	Reflections and Self-Evaluations Each Semester
Evaluations by Supervisor Each Semester	Evaluations by Supervisor Each Semester
Portfolio as Final Assessment	Portfolio as Final Assessment

### *Similarities in Competencies Identified*

The CSP Program at Bowling Green State University and the SAHE program at Colorado State University are currently using different competency models. The BGSU utilizes the model created by ACPA and NASPA in 2010. This model has 10 competency areas: advising and helping, assessment, evaluation, and research, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ethical professional practice, history, philosophy, and values, human and organizational resources, law, policy, and governance, leadership, personal foundations, and student learning and development. The model at Colorado State is broken down into knowledge competencies and professional practice competencies.

The knowledge competencies area includes assessment and evaluation, student learning, legal issues, and diversity. The professional practice competencies area is broken down into five broader competencies of administrative functions and processes, managing self, communication, working relationship with others, and mobilizing innovation and change. There are many specific competencies that are similar in both models. Examples include leadership, law, diversity,

assessment and evaluation, professional ethics, history, student development, and interpersonal relationships. In general, the competencies covered by the models are very similar. Due to the major similarities, I think it is easier to distinguish between the two competency models by discussing the three major differences between the models. First, the competency area categories identified for each of the models are different. This enables, or forces, depending on how you look at it, students to focus on those different categories. Students seemed to speak of the bigger category titles rather than the specific bullets listed underneath in both competency models.

Second, the model at Colorado State separates their competencies into knowledge based competencies and professional practice based competencies. Based on interviews, I found that most students indicated that the knowledge based competencies were acquired through class while the professional practice based competencies were acquired through assistantships and practica. However, one student at CSU expressed the benefits of having a flexible model and the ability to acquire competencies through all experiences. “It allows us the flexibility to perceive where we think we are achieving them. Some of those knowledge competencies, we could be getting them and probably are from our practical experiences, but if we feel more strongly tied to those, we could use those as evidence that we are meeting those competencies.”

The third difference is that the model used by CSU lists *mobilizing innovation and change* as a competency which is not covered at all in the BGSU model. This competency is defined as the individual’s ability to develop creative solutions to problems, engage in the change process, and be a personal change agent. As mentioned earlier, there are a lot of other competencies that are different, but do seem to be covered in general across the models. However, this large categorical area under the CSU model is not mentioned in the BGSU model at all.

There were a lot of similarities when I looked at which competencies students struggled to develop and the competencies with which students were not struggling. In general, students at both programs made a clear distinction between the content-based, or knowledge-based, competencies and the practical-based, or professional practice, competencies. They spoke of how certain competencies were developed in classes and certain competencies were developed in out-of-class experiences, without any overlap. For example, students waited for the class on the relative topic before trying to obtain experience in the competency. They did not believe that they could achieve the law, policy, and governance (BGSU) or legal, contractual, and liability issues (CSU) competency until they took a law course. A student from BGSU provides a similar example related to the history competency. “I think history, philosophy, and values. It is the one that I am probably the weakest on. I mean, we had our foundations class which had a big history component. But I kind of went through that because I had to. But I don’t rarely seek out opportunities to develop my understanding of the history and philosophy.”

Another similarity is that at least one student in each program reported wanting more experience in the area of assessment, research, and evaluation. This was not a consensus by either group though. A student at CSU had this to say about the competency area. “I think that for me, the very last one is the research one. We have a research course first semester and then we do program evaluation course this semester. But outside of those two classes, I am not doing research. And that sometimes feels weird because we are in graduate school. A lot of programs are heavy research based so it is a little bit harder.”

The consensus at CSU was that the administrative processes competency area was the easiest one to achieve as they worked on that one every day. As one student put it, “Every functional area uses them.” The consensus at BGSU was that the advising and helping

competency was the easiest one to obtain and was the one that they worked on the most. The students at BGSU also thought that personal foundations were something that they worked on every day.

The personal foundations is not something that will be covered in class, so it has to just develop and we will just be playing catch-up. And for some people, you know, it is already there, it is fairly established and other people are having a rocky time with it. And I think because it is not talked about as openly, you know, in conversations with faculty or supervisors, it is never, how is your identity coming along or how is your sense of wellness? (Student)

Interesting enough, faculty and supervisors at both CSU and BGSU reported that the personal foundations competency (BGSU) or managing self competency (CSU) was the one that students struggled with the most. The specific problem areas include: identity, values, confidence, relationships, and wellness. One supervisor at CSU developed an additional requirement to the assistantship in order to help student's manage the inevitable personal development processes and issues that will arise.

The other piece that I do is implement a self-care plan and so with that self-care plan...because in those competencies it is all about the professional piece of it...that is just not all of who they are, there is also a personal piece and so especially when they are transitioning. So being able to talk about self-care wise, how are you going to take care of yourself emotionally, physically, spiritually, financially, all of those pieces so that also comes into play when I meet with them as well because those are all important pieces.

I know from my own past experience working with graduate students that a lot of my time was spent address their own emotional, mental, or spiritual needs. I am not sure if that is a product of the development field that we work in or a product of the type of individuals that we attract into the field. I do believe that the supervisors and faculty I met with understood that the students needed to work on that competency area a bunch because it is a often a prerequisite to doing well in other competencies. I do not think students understood that relationship between the competencies, but the students, and especially the ones at BGSU knew that the personal

foundations competency was an area that they worked on every day.

As stated earlier, the competencies identified within the two competency models are more similar than different when looking at the models as a whole. When Kretovics (2002) stated the need for more consensus regarding the core competencies in the field, I think it is important to note that these two programs seem to be more in agreement, than in disagreement. In fact, the competency models of both programs are addressing the same overall goal of all other masters level graduate preparation programs in student personnel, which is to prepare student personnel professionals (Badders, 1998; Hyman 1988; Keim, 1991; Meabon & Owens, 1984; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Waple, 2006).

### ***Language of Evaluation Tools***

A comparison between the two competency models produces interesting discrepancies in wording, perceptions, and structure of the evaluation tools. As discussed previously in Chapter Four, the BGSU competency model is set up for students to progress in each competency area through the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. In the purpose of the model, it specifically states how individuals can progress through the levels. “All student affairs professionals should be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the basic list of outcomes under each competency area.....if student affairs professionals desire to grow in a particular competency area, they can examine expected learning and skills in the intermediate and advanced level.” It is assumed that professionals will grow throughout their time in the field, but not necessarily in every area. The document states the general expectation for professionals. “Student affairs professionals would not be expected to hold an intermediate or advanced level of skills in all areas. Moreover, for some professionals, due to the type of work in which they engage, it may be advantageous for them to advance their knowledge and skills in certain competency areas, while still holding a

basic level of knowledge and skill in other competency areas.” Furthermore, graduate students are less likely to have achieved intermediate or advanced level skills in an area because they would usually have been in the field a short amount of time. Under each level within each competency area are bullets with specific skill sets, knowledge sets, or actions that can be used to examine whether an individual. Frequently, bullets are tied together across the levels within each competency area so an individual can see how a specific skill set might become intermediate or advanced. For example, within the assessment, research, and evaluation competency, there are bullet points regarding qualitative research. I have provided the bullets below with the level of each bullet.

- Basic - Assess trustworthiness and other aspects of quality in qualitative studies and assess the transferability of these findings to current work settings.
- Intermediate - Apply the concepts and procedures of qualitative research, evaluation, and assessment, including creating appropriate sampling designs and interview protocols with consultation, participating in analysis teams, contributing to audit trails, participating as peer de-briefer, and using other techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative designs.
- Advanced - Lead, supervise, and/or collaborate with others to design and analyze qualitative studies and evaluation, assessment, and other research activities, including assessing transferability and trustworthiness in a sophisticated way.

This specific skill set progresses in difficulty, and it provides a great example of how an individual can continue to develop in a competency area even after they complete the program. The document and competency model sets each competency area along a continuum and then expects individuals to reflect and examine their current level. Students are then able to make plans, get experiences, and progress along the continuum to another level.

On the other hand, the competency model utilized by CSU identifies knowledge-based competencies and professional-practice based competencies. There is no built-in evaluation tool with the model. Students evaluate themselves each semester in each competency on a scale of one to five. During their final defense of the portfolio, the students are graded using a rubric that



evaluates how well they demonstrated their “attainment” of the competency. This seems to be the key difference to me between the assessments of the competencies at each program. The CSU students evaluate their attainment of the competencies, while the BGSU students evaluate their development of the competencies. Some of it could be semantics at play as respondents at both programs used words like acquisition, achievement, attainment, and development.

However, I did inherently see a difference between the assessment practices as mentioned.

Students at CSU spoke of needing some experience in a content area in order to achieve that competency. The students at BGSU wanted the experience to “work on” that competency area.

When asked about the difference between the two, one supervisor at CSU provided this reflection.

I really liked the advanced, medium, beginner, first because it acknowledges that after two years of grad school, I don’t have all of this down....at all....It seems like the competencies are sort of the CAS standards for the graduate program, you know what I mean....I think that that is some benefit, to be able to benchmark growth, to be able to say, you know, I am growing in this area. I guess in that way, ranking them seems a little more realistic to me, then to have accomplished...how many are there here...30?

A faculty member at BGSU also provided a reflection for me on the evaluation tool. This faculty member believed that exact measurement of skills in the field is difficult, though.

So if we do a session on legal issues, we can say you attended it, but are we really assessing those outcomes that you could respond to an exam and pass an exam to the content of that? And even if you know the content, that may or may not speak to the regular skills in that area. A lot of these things are pretty difficult to measure and in this field, we don’t have good measurement tools.

In my study of both models, there seems to be major developmental advantages to the BGSU model. The continuum encourages students to assess and reflect on their current level and then seek out opportunities and learning experiences to develop that competency. This model also is something that can be carried with the student forward into their professional career as it is meant to be utilized at all levels of student affairs practice. When a student at BGSU realizes that

he or she must show progress within an area in their final portfolio, it seems much more meaningful to me. This is not to say that students at CSU are not getting as strong experiences as the students at BGSU. Rather, the students at BGSU are just expected to show some development along the continuum of each competency area. Students at CSU are not. Students at CSU can merely show experience in the area of a competency and write a reflection regarding what they learned.

However, I do not want to make it seem as simple as asking students to document development along a continuum. The main problem with learning outcomes and competency models is that the act of proving outcomes can be very difficult. Programs attempt to use a direct measure of those outcomes (Huba & Freed, 1999), but in my perception from my study, the portfolio has a lot of indirect measure components. Portfolios from both programs utilize reflections and self-reporting from graduate students, which are indirect measures. One faculty member at BGSU provided a view of competencies in general and how the profession has developed ways to assess the necessary skill sets for professionals in the field.

You know, the professions have been around for more than 100 years now, and it took 95 years to come up with an agreement on a set of competencies that we all think are important. I think that is the tension you have, anytime you formalize the competencies, there is an expectation that you fulfill those competencies, but yet all those competencies are not necessary in each type of position. How do you balance that specificity with the unique type of responsibilities of the student's professional role? And that is why we went with that three-tier kind of step that everybody has to be at the highest level in all of the competencies. They can say, these are the ones I feel really good about, these are the ones I feel pretty good about, these are the ones that I know I need to work on so I will continue to address those.

### *Assessment Process of the Competency Model*

Despite the differences in the evaluation tools, it was very clear that the programs at both institutions believed in ongoing and continual assessment of the competencies in order to maximize the success of each student. Both programs had reflection pieces that occurred

throughout the two years and both programs required evaluations on the students at the end of each semester. These evaluations are completed by the student and by the supervisor at CSU and at BGSU. Students spoke of these evaluations steps and their frequent conversations with their advisors that held them accountable to working on the competencies throughout the program, and not just right before the final portfolio is due. One student from BGSU had this to say: “I think that the amount of time we spend just thinking about it, I mean it is not a daily or weekly thing for me, but we do at some points have checkpoints to make sure that we are not missing anything. So we kind of go through and make sure there are no weak links along the way.”

Supervisors and faculty members at BGSU and CSU provided similar responses to me about the evaluations that helped them reflect frequently on how the graduate students were doing in terms of their competencies. Supervisors at both programs expressed the desire to have more communication with the faculty and the advisors about the progress of the student. Communication suggestions included simple conversations, formalized meetings, or inclusion in the portfolio defense process. One supervisor at CSU provided this reflection on how communication with the academic program has been helpful.

Just this year, we have started to be...more consistent in meeting with the advisors to say, what are you seeing in this student, here is what I am seeing in this student? And do you know this piece or do you know why it is that say their grades may have gone from here to here and being to talk about that. So I think that those...we need to continue to do that. I think that those are always beneficial.

Another similarity between the two programs is that none of the students had ever looked back at their competency self evaluations or their supervisor’s evaluations of their competencies each semester to reflect on and examine their progress. They did look at their reflections at the end of their entire program when they were trying to create their portfolio, but the semester evaluations of their competencies were not reviewed again after being completed. A few students

in each program said that competencies were part of informal discussions with both advisors and supervisors, but no one spoke to formalized discussions about past evaluations. One CSU student said this about the idea of trying to compare his evaluation scores on the competencies every semester. “I don’t want to be like, number 27, I said four last time so how have I improved in my practicum or something. But I do feel like as I have done them, I have progressed. It is apparent in certain areas.” Another student provided similar thoughts about looking back at past evaluations to reflect on progress. “I have not looked at mine either to see if they have really specific things to meet to move from one level to level two. Ours are pretty subjective in terms of what I am feeling.” I got the sense from faculty and supervisors that they wish students would do more looking back on past evaluations because it would be very helpful for the students, but I did not get a sense that people feel there is the time or energy to hold students accountable to it. One supervisor spoke of needing to spend more time on the day-to-day responsibilities of the assistantship with the student, and when those responsibilities overlapped with the competencies, there was just an added benefit for the student.

I saw one main difference between the ongoing competency model assessment processes of the two programs. That difference is that CSU requires each student to undergo a preliminary exam at the end of the first year with their graduate committee. This enables the committee, advisor, and student to check on progress of the student and to make any necessary plans for the final year. The student is required to speak to a few competencies that they have obtained and can reflect on. Based on the advisor, the experience was different for each student. One student said that for her the preliminary exam was “about the number of products we had, not the number of competencies we were defending.” Regardless, this formalized checkpoint is an extra step for the Colorado State students, which is not present in the BGSU program. I think this is a

great feature of the CSU program, and something that would benefit the students at BGSU. The students at BGSU did seem to be a little bit unsure about what the final defense process would look like and how hard it would be to speak to their committee. This preliminary exam could help prevent some unknowns and ease some fears.

### ***Individual Student versus the Social Environment***

The fourth theme that I found in the data is the concept of the individual student and that student's relationship to their social environment. This took on different forms at each institution, but respondents at both institutions believed that the competencies provided some uniform standards while still allowing for individual experiences. The social environment at each institution has a strong influence on the success of the student, in spite of the student's background, potential, and intrinsic motivations. At both institutions, three specific components of the social environment are important to discuss. These components are the supervisor-student relationships, the advisor-student relationship, and the cohort group. I found that each individual student has a different experience based on his or her social environment. Furthermore, the individual background of each student and his or her level of intrinsic motivations interact differently with the social environment to impact his or her success with the competency model.

### ***Student Backgrounds***

BGSU and CSU both proudly state that they have a very diverse group of students in their program. Being well-known programs with national reputations, they assumingly also attract very strong academic and well-rounded students. I wanted to understand how the individual student characteristics could affect the general success of the competency model. One faculty member at BGSU provided me with one view of how input might or might not influence the output.

You know, there are students here are the best of the best and there are some perfectly okay. You know that's the case...that is the case at a number of really good programs, I think. As I said before, we don't miss very often but when we miss....we miss big. So, it is not like every student is going to blow the roof off the place. But I think that certainly they would leave with a lot of key concepts in the field and this competency model is a part of it. And we certainly try to push that link. I tell students I want us to graduate scholarly practitioners and scholars with a good eye towards practice. I want you to have good skills and this helps frame this. But I also want you to be intellectually oriented and I want you to keep that up.

Faculty at both programs spoke of the benefits of the competency model because it provides some uniform requirements for all students, but it does not mean that all students are successful with it. Furthermore, one faculty member at CSU made it clear to me that even the students with the most potential coming in, might not be successful in the end. This faculty member believed that the competency model was a step towards providing more accountability and expectations on students in an historically "soft" field. This faculty member believed that other disciplines did not graduate students who were not competent or prepared for the rigor of the academic program. Student affairs was a lot more lenient on students who faltered according to this faculty member said: "There are highly skilled and intelligent students that are selected, but they could falter as easily as the ones that need help and some do. And we have had in the last...over the years...some really bomb and people were like well....and I was like, really? You know, that would not happen in, you know...engineering, in any hard science. You don't cut the mustard, you don't go on."

Supervisors also spoke about how intelligence and skills played a factor in the success of the graduate students. Interestingly, two supervisors also spoke of how certain personality styles seemed to cater to the competency model more. Skills that were cited as being beneficial for working through the competency model and preparing for the portfolio defense included strong reflection skills, self-actualization, organization, and detail-oriented. This supervisor provided

this comparison between two different graduate students and their success with the model.

I would say that it has helped my second year grad more than a first year grad. I think seeing both of them, they might have been a different person as well, but my second year seems more reflective. Trying to figure out...okay, I am starting to put together my resume, but how can I use these competencies...to reflect it on my resume and what competencies do I need to see, or what competencies could I get second semester even, that I don't currently have. Where my first year grad was a little, a little less concerned about them. Even, when I brought them up to him a couple times, he was well I will get them, let's see what happens. And I think they are more just trying to learn the position still and what their role within the position is. So they are not concerned about it.

Ultimately, I found through discussions with students, supervisors, and faculty that much of the student's success with the competency model was related to the intrinsic motivation of the student. For the most part, I can also acknowledge that the students who were willing to volunteer and make time for my study might be a certain type of student. I knew ahead of time that I probably would not be speaking to students who were apathetic, maybe close to leaving the program, oblivious to the competency model, etc. I was intentional in my questioning of all of my respondents to ask about all of the students and not just the ones that were successful with the model.

### ***Intrinsic Motivation***

The competency models at both CSU and BGSU are set up with structures in place to help each student meet certain standards while still encouraging individual differences and experiences. Similarly, each model requires some initiative and responsibility on the part of the student to complete the necessary steps and to make the most of experiences. There is also a support social environment surrounding the individual student at both programs. The social environment will be covered in the next section.

Students, supervisors, and faculty members thought that intrinsic motivation was a very important factor if the student was going to maximize their education and get the most out of

their experiences and the competency model. One supervisor had this view of the model. “I think a lot of it is intrinsic. You have to want to do it, because even if you are forced to use it, you can use it but then are not really getting anything out of it. But if you are really trying to grow as a professional, the opportunities with the competencies are really great. If you are using it for what it can be used for.” It was apparent that the programs and the competency model set up minimum standards and the structure was put in place to hold students accountable to those standards. However, most of the respondents I spoke with thought that some onus was put on the students to do the extra work to seek out the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences. A faculty member at BGSU had this to say about applying for professional involvement opportunities and the fact that students have to do the work to be chosen for those honors.

The bottom line is that you have to be the one to apply for that and follow through to arrange these opportunities. So talking with your supervisor, talking to your advisor, talking to your classmates, talking to the second-years, there are pretty of ideas to be had and how to do that. It is taking the initiative and prioritizing that. And I think that there enough students who do that really well who provide a good role model and example for that.

Students in both programs agreed that intrinsic motivation was important, but all of the students I met with thought the competency model represented minimum uniform expectations. The students believed that each of them had the ability to expand their competencies and resumes by getting as many experiences and opportunities as they could while in the program. One student provided this very pointed answer to whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation drove most students to be successful with the model. “The intrinsic motivation because if you take it seriously and you have enough energy to be involved and want to develop along those criteria then you are going to look for those opportunities and I don’t think there is anything that the faculty can assign that will make you more reflective or more interested in doing it.” There was at least one student in each program who thought the model was geared towards the student who



might lack some intrinsic motivation, and maybe needed something or someone to hold them accountable. This student from BGSU thought that the model helped all students.

We all have very different experiences, but we have the commonality in meeting these competencies. So I think that it serves its purpose, that maybe people who are really intrinsically-motivated and who are do their best in this program and take every advantage of every opportunity they can, they will be getting diverse opportunities regardless. But except that expectation that that is not the type of person you are, you are still going to meet this and you are still going to get a well-rounded experience. I don't know that it makes us better, with a sense of accountability with it.

This student made the point that the model provides structure and support regardless of whether the student needs that external motivation. Students did speak to that structure and said that there could always be more structure, deadlines, and formal expectations. However, most doubted whether that change would help those that struggled and most believed that some responsibility should be placed on the student. A BGSU student said this about students in the program: "I think more structure would help people stay organized, but that does not change how serious they take it." Another student from BGSU agreed with that thought and said this about students struggling with the development of their competencies. "I think there is just enough intentionality that they are not going to be left behind, but they could be doing more obviously. They could find their own opportunities, but it does come up in the monthly [CSP 6890] classes. So if they are not even thinking about it all, that is the time that it is introduced to them...or reminded or something like that."

From my view of it, both programs provided a few structural components and guidelines for students, but assumingly extrinsically-motivated students were still going to struggle unless they had the right faculty advisor in place to help them meet the necessary expectations and guidelines. This is especially true at BGSU since they did not have a structured class like the portfolio class at CSU where all deadlines and expectations could be communicated in a uniform

manner. I will speak more to the role of the advisor in the section on social environment.

On the other hand, when asked, faculty members did not think that more structure needed to be put in place.. Some did believe that more difficult conversations could take place with individual students, which is hard in a field dedicated to support and development. Faculty members at both programs said that students rarely fail to graduate from the program. When it occurs, the decision to leave the program seems to be made early by the student. If the student matriculates to the second year, I got the sense that the student graduates. However, I did get the feeling that some students graduate from the programs despite not meeting the informal expectations of faculty members, supervisors and/or their peers. One faculty member at CSU described this as the challenge: “I am being supportive and trying to find the best in someone and making them succeed. But at some point, some people don’t succeed. And we have this...how far do we take out this...when do we recognize we are doing someone a disservice by continuing, facilitating work that is not meeting the standards or actually the responsibilities that are expected?” The faculty members and supervisors are in prime positions to have the difficult conversations and the competency model could be a great tool for those conversations. The challenge and support that the student could get from their mentors, faculty members, supervisors, and peers help shape who he or she as an individual and how successful they could possibly be with the competency model. However, according to my research, the programs are not having these conversations.

### ***Supervisor-Student Relationship***

The relationship that the student has with the assistantship supervisor is very important at both institutions. A majority of the student’s time is spent in the assistantship and the supervisor can have a strong influence on how the student grows as a professional and how the student is

able to develop identified competencies. One supervisor from CSU spoke to me how important it is for supervisors to understand that the graduate students should be viewed as students first, which means that students should constantly in learning mode. A student from BGSU reiterated this same idea and spoke of the challenges that can arise when the learning piece is forgotten.

I think for me part of it is that I am very much seen as...our office does not necessarily see graduate students as students all of the time. And so part of it is that we...like with my supervisor in particular, our discussions are about work and the content of work and what is going on with the students who we work with. So very little ends up being about my development...and it is not to say that we don't occasionally have that conversation or talk about personal well-being but umm it is much more work centered I would suppose.

Other students spoke of simple supervisory styles or personality styles and how this can influence the relationship between the student and the supervisor. These factors can influence the relationships they have with their supervisor, which thus can influence the quality and quantity of conversations they have about their development and the competencies. One student from CSU talked about how his supervisor makes him take the initiative to start the necessary conversations.

My supervisor put the onus on me to bring it up. I know that he is filling them out and checking in with me about the competencies. But he asked me frequently what I think I am missing. Because even though I might feel I am fulfilling a competency, he wants to make sure that I am fulfilling it to the degree that I want to fulfill it. So he is kind of put it more in my direction. I think that is more of a stylistic thing, I don't think it is.....

On the other hand, another student at CSU said that her supervisor is much more intentional about the conversations and has proactively asked her to do certain things.

I know for me personally, my supervisor has really challenged me to reflect on the competencies and how I am going about meeting each one since day one. Even in this semester, I am involved in a lot outside my assistantship so he recommended that I list everything that I am doing and come up with specific goals and actionable items and timelines for how I am meeting specific competencies with each of these involvement opportunities.

This shows how supervisory styles can differ within institution and across institutions.

This supervisor-student relationship is even more important when one considers that an incoming student does not choose their supervisor and often does not meet that supervisor until the first day of work. Besides the need for the all students to take the initiative to be responsible for their own development, one faculty member also spoke of the need for students to learn how to manage their supervisors. “Someone also could say that that is good supervisor management, to make sure your supervisor is meeting with you on a regular basis and does their paperwork as well. You need to learn how to be a good supervisor manager.” Despite all of the different styles that were cited by students, none of the students seemed to be unhappy in their assistantship experience. Most spoke of adapting to their supervisor’s style and being accepting of how it was different than the style of the supervisors of their peers. I also noticed that the supervisors I spoke to might have been a skewed sample as most of them seemed very invested in the personal and professional development of their graduate students. One could assume that those supervisors who were not as interested in the development of their students and/or who were not fulfilling the informal and formal steps of the competency model would likely not volunteer to be part of my study. One supervisor provided a very good reflection on how the competency model and the intentional conversations are beneficial to certain personality styles of supervisors. “I would just say on a selfish level, it has allowed me to get to know them on a personal level, instead of just how they show up in their assistantship. And for me being a high context, blue, you know, person. I love it. It allows me to have that genuine person.”

Again, I think it is fair to assume that not every supervisor on either campus is completing all of their formal and informal responsibilities when it comes to the competency model for their student. Nor is every supervisor a developmental, student-learning based supervisor that will provide the maximum learning experience for the student. This is more true

because there are often graduate assistantship supervisors in their first year in the role because of transitions. The time it takes to learn the responsibilities of a new job is lengthy, and the first priority of every first year supervisor might not be the competency model for their graduate student. I say all of this because I got the sense that the supervisory styles, supervisory experience, and supervisory skills could vary greatly for the supervisors on both campuses. When my research found that this relationship between the student and the supervisor has a profound influence on the success of the student with the model, it is in the best interest of the programs to have more investment in who is supervising the graduate students and who is training them to be supervisors.

### ***Faculty Advisor-Student Relationship***

The relationship between the student and the faculty advisor is also important to the success of the student both with the model and the student's progress towards graduation. In both programs, the student is assigned an advisor from the start and one of the main roles of the advisor is to challenge the student to grow personally and professionally, while also making sure that the student completes all program requirements. The graduate students do rely on their advisors to know the requirements and deadlines and communicate those to the students. As mentioned earlier in the section on Colorado State, the students in the SAHE program there also have the Portfolio courses where such relevant information is disseminated to all students at the same time.

The Portfolio courses at CSU do create one big difference in the advisor-student relationships that could occur at each institution. At BGSU, students are separated into small groups to take the CSP 6890 course together each semester. The faculty member of each of these groups is also the advisor for these students. Though there are some general guidelines, each

advisor has a different formal structure and informal style with his or her small group. Individual meetings with the each student might or might not be happening on a regular basis. This influences the relationship that each student has with his or her respective advisor. One student provided this opinion on how different advisor's styles impact the student.

I think for advising especially, measuring it against how we are looking at the competencies, there are certain ones that...we can say there is the one for sure that is very intentional about developing artifacts or having students develop artifacts and thinking about the competencies monthly. Others, mine for example, who...I mean there was a sort of summary of assessment at the end of the year, and that was it. As far as it goes, for really intentionally, formally looking at the competencies.

Another student at BGSU spoke of how the advisor for his/her small group was very easy-going and did not speak to the competency model as much. This advisor also did not have as many expectations in regards to the reflection that is due each month. "It is a lot looser to the extent that it is not tied to the competencies, but some of us will write about the competencies, and the highs and the lows, challenges and opportunities of the last month. So our advisor will read them and discuss them during our 6890 meetings."

The mere number of students assigned to each advisor also could have an impact on the time that the faculty member could devote to each student. As mentioned earlier, the advisors at BGSU have about 12 total advisees at any given time while the advisors at Colorado State have about four. This is a big difference, but it is also important to mention that the faculty member/advisors at Colorado State are also full-time practitioners so priorities and responsibilities are different.

The students in both programs spoke positively of their advisors, and most did not think that it was a problem that each student might have a different experience due to his or her advisor's style. Students thought that the competency model helped provide some uniformity and standardization for the students, while still allowing each student to seek their own experiences.

This student from Colorado State spoke of how the consistency of the model benefited students. “If each faculty member had his or her own model of assessing every graduate that would become crazy. Hopefully, everyone is moving along the same pathway. I mean not the same exact pathway, hopefully each individual would choose their own pathway, but having that common language throughout is important.” The competency model can provide that common language and consistency for students within the program, and that seems crucial when there are different advisors. Though reported not to be, I think it should be a real concern for both programs when the student’s success with the competency model is influenced so heavily on the style of advisor and how positive of a relationship that has been formed between the student and the advisor. However, one can say that the advisor-student relationship is important to the success of the graduate student in all fields of study.

I did ascertain from my interviews that some advisors were willing to modify their styles to meet the needs or wants of each student. When meeting with Colorado State students and asking them about specific expectations, I often heard phrases like “depends” and “depends on your advisor.” The initial ambiguity to me changed to more of an adaptable program that wanted to meet individual student styles. One student provided this reflection on what his regular meetings with his advisor look like because that is what he needs from the meetings. “Yeah, I do that every meeting with my advisor, we go over competencies. But that might just be me. That is how I like to run.”

Ultimately, advisors, supervisors, and the faculty members in both programs saw the advisor-student relationship as an important accountability piece with the competency model. The reflections, conversations, evaluations, and planning helped the student develop and achieve all of the identified competencies. This student from BGSU spoke of how his relationship with

his advisor the regular conversations provided the necessary checkpoints to make sure he was successful.

I think that the amount of time we spend just thinking about it, I mean it is not a daily or weekly thing for me, but we do at some points have checkpoints to make sure that we are not missing anything. So we kind of go through and make sure there are no weak links along the way. So that helps in recalling...because there are one or two that you have had no experience with, that would be a red flag.

Regardless of how the relationship is set up, all people interviewed agreed that it is the responsibility of the student to take ownership over their development and success. As one faculty member said: “Rarely does it happen this way, but sometimes no one knows that the student is struggling because they do not tell anyone.” This main point of this statement seemed to be widely accepted by all of the stakeholders with whom I met. It speaks back to the theme of the individual student and the intrinsic motivation that is valued in the competency model. However, this statement also speaks to another underlying point that I spoke to earlier about structure. Some students, especially at BGSU, expressed the desire for more formal and uniform structure. This might help prevent an occurrence in which a student is struggling, but no one knows until it is too late. Furthermore, increased communication between the advisor, student, and supervisor could help make sure everyone is aware of how the student is doing in all aspects of the program. I will speak to education and communication later on in this chapter.

### ***Cohort Group***

In both programs, the influence that the peer group has on each individual student can be immense. Peer influence is a big part of the social environment of each student at both the CSU and BGSU programs. The structure of the cohort group takes on different forms, but a core difference between the programs is that the students in the CSU program meet as one large group in the Portfolio class and the students in the BGSU program meet in smaller groups with their



advisor in the CSP 6890 courses. At BGSU, these small groups share an advisor and share certain experiences that other groups might not have. According to the students, this does create some bonds between members of the groups, but friendships are created across groups as well. One student said that these small groups help provide support as they built their final portfolios. “We all felt like we were in this boat together. So meeting with your advisor, being like what does yours look like and what does this look like. And mine was a website and somebody else had a binder.”

Students at BGSU also spoke to me about how different group dynamics and advisor expectations are scrutinized by students. “We are always looking towards these other groups and the way people are doing things to get there and develop their competencies so there is this sense I guess of underlying pressure to make sure that [you get your competencies met].” Despite this scrutiny, another student said that small group, informal structure forced students to have conversations with other students for advice and suggestions about the competencies and the portfolio. “People actually think about it. I have had conversations with people about it outside of class and outside of advisor groups, just you know, between friends and it comes up.” When asked if there was competition among students at BGSU, the students in the focus group would not concede or deny it. They thought that there was some underlying pressure to succeed and most students worked very hard to do so. However, the students found it hard to compare themselves to other students because every experience was so different. The faculty seemed to agree with the fact that students had high expectations of themselves, and there was not a lot of competition between students; however, one faculty member said that some cohort groups in the past have been very competitive. The competition seems to be centered around experiences, assistantships, awards, and involvement opportunities, though, and not necessarily about the

competencies.

Several of the students that I spoke to at Colorado State University believed that competition was prevalent throughout the SAHE program. One student said, “I see competition there. I definitely see it in our classes. I think grades for me are extremely important. Some of the people in our cohort don’t care. But when you have to do group projects, it is like who is going to be the best group.” Similar to BGSU, the competition did not necessarily refer to development along the competency model, unless it related to experiences that students were trying to get. I asked supervisors and faculty members what they thought about the competition between the students. One supervisor believed that even the competencies brought on competition between students, but the competition was also about meeting expectations of supervisors, advisors, and peers and their own expectations.

I think they are comparing themselves to themselves. I think that they are comparing themselves to their cohort and there is a lot of that competition and that competitive talk in the classroom. And I don’t know if it is the classroom or it is just the generation. I don’t know if that is the piece. And then...I hate to admit it, but the other part is they are comparing themselves to my expectations, you know. And it is not fair, yet at the same time, I am not sure what to do with that.

A faculty member at CSU said that the program tries to encourage individual experiences and individual goals so comparison is not necessary. This faculty member spoke of how different students will have strengths and challenges when it comes to the identified competencies. “Every student is going to advance along that at different paces and they will reach certain....some of them will advance on others where others will make slower progress or that sort of thing.”

Ultimately, I found that in both programs that the cohort group was a catalyst for students as they sought out experiences, opportunities, and competencies. I use the word catalyst, because cohort group members took all forms: competitors, collaborators, supporters, challengers, and friends. One student from CSU had this idealistic perception of the healthy competition within

the cohort.

I think that some of it is...like I think I am pretty competitive with my grades as well, but that is an internal competition...I don't know why I have it, but I do. So when you get many of those people in the same room, people that were getting good grades in their classes before and there are all of these top-notch students in the same room. I think that is part of where it comes from, but at the same time, my experience is so different than everybody in this room. I would say that there is a sense of pride...I am proud of [my peer] for the things that she is doing, and I couldn't necessary do them. She is doing really fantastic things and I am proud of what she is doing in that regard. I am not looking at her and thinking...is she better than me?

Regardless of how the cohort group is perceived by the individual student, that cohort group is an influential part of the social environment which has an effect on the development of identified competencies.

### ***Education and Communication of Competency Model***

An important piece to the competency model in both programs is the education of supervisors and students so they have a working knowledge of how to effectively use the model and all of supplemental evaluative pieces. As provided in the previous sections, training on the model for the students in both programs begins as early as the day individuals step on campus for interviews. Through formal training sessions during August orientation, to conversations with advisors, to informal interactions with peers, the students are provided with a variety of ways to learn about the model. The key distinction between the two programs is the small 6890 groups at BGSU and the entire cohort participating in the Portfolio course at CSU. Training and education on the competency model is provided to students through both structures. However, I did speak previously about how the BGSU students do get different experiences based on which faculty member leads their 6890 group. Inevitably, different small groups will receive different levels or styles of training on the competency model.

Students at BGSU also spoke of the fact that they depend on the students in the second

year in the program to provide advice and beneficial knowledge about the program. One student had this to say.

I think that is part of it and maybe this is a function of the program entirely, but a lot of information that is passed on is year to year, you know the second years to the first years or in passing with our faculty members some times. I feel like it has been awhile since I have had any formal conversation about the competencies. And that is partially because we don't do it as much in our 6890 group just like [another student] does.

The students at BGSU do not necessary feel that they are missing information, but two students expressed a desire to have more formal structures in place to help them understand the competency model and the necessary expectations. The CSU students did not say that they benefitted from the advice and wisdom of the more experienced students, but that is not to say that they do not. They did say that the Portfolio course is set up to provide the information they need, and the instructor sends out emails to document any necessary information, deadlines, expectations that they might need to know regarding the program or the competency model.

It was a common trend among the supervisors at both programs for them to desire more information about the competency model and to have more communication with the advisors regarding the development of the graduate student. Regular supervisor training sessions are occurring at CSU each semester, while BGSU has one training session for supervisors every year. The competency model and the necessary documents are a topic for the training sessions at both programs. Supervisors indicated that scheduling conflicts do cause problems because then the information is missed completely sometimes. I found that most of the supervisors I met with struggled to name even a few of the identified competencies within their respective model. Most asked to look at my copy of their competency document, which I provided. It became apparent to me that some of the supervisors only look at the competency list at the end of each semester when they have to fill out the evaluation on the student. I believe these supervisors have the

desire to be very intentional and have ongoing conversations about the competencies throughout the semester, but the model gets lost in other priorities.

I also found that supervisors had little knowledge about the portfolio requirements that their graduate students had to complete. Most did not require their graduate students to show them their final portfolio, though all thought it would be personally rewarding to see the final product. One supervisor told me that having more knowledge about the portfolio could help her support her graduate student during the planning process, as well as help her professionally in her supervision of graduate students.

I think for my own personal knowledge, it would probably be, it would be beneficial to know more about the portfolio piece of it. So I have a basic understanding of it, and have definitely seen examples of that, but have never been to the portfolio class to say what the intentionality behind creating this is. So I think if I had a greater understanding of that, it would help me to be a better supervisor. I think the other piece that might be nice, and again I am not in the classroom with them, but I think another piece that would be helpful for them to be able to share some of the stuff that is in their portfolio.

I spoke with faculty members about the education of the model and communication between advisors and supervisors. Faculty members at both programs described what they perceived to be open lines of communication with supervisors and some described past examples of how both sides worked together to assist the student in his or her development. One faculty member from BGSU believed that communication with supervisors occurs when it is necessary and a student is struggling. “I think that our supervisors feel pretty comfortable in calling us. We always tell the students that they need to let the supervisors know who their advisor is. It is a three-way relationship. The students are certainly very willing to let us know when they are getting good supervision or when the supervision is not adequate. They have no reservations about sharing that with us.” It seems like this approach encourages conversation only when something is wrong so conversations do not happen very often. In comparing the two programs, I definitely saw a

bigger disconnect between the faculty members and the supervisors at BGSU, because the CSU faculty members were also practitioners and so professional and personal relationships had formed on more than one level.

Faculty members at both programs encouraged students to include their supervisors in discussions about their academic performance and in decision-making processes about their experiences. Rarely at either program was the supervisor invited into formal meetings about the student's progress or development, unless the student was struggling. However, one faculty member at BGSU described to me how expectations are set for students regarding what communication will occur with supervisors.

And one of the things that they always raise is confidentiality, you know what is said in 6890, stays in 6890. And I always tell them, that I can live with that up to a point. If I hear from a supervisor that things are not going well, I am going to talk to you about it. If I hear from you that things are not going well, I am going to talk with the supervisor about it. If it is a problem that is a systemic problem, I am going to talk to the chair about that. So, I think that we all feel the same way. Even though those are privileged communications, if concerns rise to a particular level that we feel that it can't be addressed by me calling up the supervisor, then we have to look at a larger programmatic change.

I found that supervisors who had been around longer possessed more knowledge about the competency model and the necessary documents and expectations of the program. New supervisors often depended on these more-experienced supervisors to provide them the necessary education on the model informally, similar to the way that first year students depended on the experience of the second-year students. I found that students, supervisors, and faculty members agreed that more knowledge and education on the competency model for all parties involved could help maximize the chances of success for the graduate students.

### ***Overall Assessment Results of the Model***

The final theme that I found in the data has been discussed previously in the separate

sections for both programs. I spent a lot of time researching the concept of analyzing and utilizing overall assessment results from the competency model to advance learning. Both programs openly admitted to not spending much effort or time in the area of overall assessment results of the competency model. In my discussion with the students, none of them were keeping track of their longitudinal evaluations to reflect on and/or act on development of the competencies. This is despite the fact that faculty members in both programs encourage students to do so. If nothing else, students are told that the records could help them as they try to complete their portfolios. The faculty members of programs do keep the records to speak to students about them in advising appointments and during the formal discussions about the semester evaluation results. Several faculty members also pointed out that the assessment results inevitably shock students.

Then we tell them to keep a hold of this to see your tracking on that. It is helpful for the analysis portion of their electronic portfolio. You probably saw the question on there, but invariably people go backward on their assessment. They will have rated themselves more highly initially and then they will start to learn that I did not know as much about this as I thought I did. It is probably a more realistic assessment so they back up. So we usually talk about that, what happened there, so they realize it is not like you lost skills, it is just a more realistic understanding of them.

Only one supervisor had ever gone back to look at past evaluations of an individual graduate student to help direct evaluations and discussion on another evaluation. No supervisors tracked or analyzed results of multiple graduate students to look at averages or trends. To be fair, the evaluation documents at both programs were set up as individual documents and extra steps would have to be taken by a supervisor to gather such results.

The faculty members at both programs have access to the overall assessment results of the entire student cohort. The BGSU program would have to spend some extra time calculating those results. The CSU program runs the evaluations of the competencies through an online

software program so the results are available readily. Two faculty members at BGSU spoke of the desire to do more with the assessment results. One faculty member said this: “I would say that we definitely have room to strengthen that. We ought to be capturing more data for our assessment purposes. You know, having, setting up survey monkey for students to do that throughout the program. I have to turn in an assessment report this week. We have not captured that data really in any meaningful way.” This same faculty member thought that the assessment results were important because there is a connection between the competency model and the success of the students in the program. It is not the only reason that students are successful, but it is one of the reasons. Any assessment results that help provide some proof of that connection would be very beneficial.

But I would say that all that as a field or as a program that we have done a good assessment of this thing. I can look at some things that I hope are related, like our placement rate. You know, our student do get jobs. Is it because we use this model? No, but I do think that it is completely disconnected? No, because if you look at that capstone seminar, and I have rattled off those three questions, what do I believe or value, what do I know and what can I do, the ability to answer those questions as you can imagine is pretty helpful on the job search. But I think that we tackle those questions in various ways throughout the program, but as a culminating experience, to look back over the almost two years in the program, that works, and it is a piece of it. Because this is one of the ways, not the only way, but one of the key ways for them to frame their skills and knowledge to a large degree. So I don't think that it is a fluke, not just that our students get jobs, but the kinds of jobs they get. And most of that will entertain multiple offers and go to a variety of very fine institutions. I can't prove the link, but I am hard-pressed to believe there is not some connection there.

Finally, faculty members at both programs also spoke of the constant need for program review data. Often the data that was provided was graduation rates and job placement rates. However, the assessment results from the competency model and proof that intended learning outcomes were met would also be very beneficial. One faculty member brought up the concern if the initial aggregate data on each individual student was provided, given that most students decline in self-ranking over the semesters as previously discussed.



What we have found over here as we aggregate the data is that most of the students come in thinking they have a pretty good handle on all of these things and they leave rating themselves lower than what they had other the semesters. And um...for us to use it as program evaluation data, it would mean that oh my god they come here and we screw them up. Yeah, but in fact that is not the case at all. Instead they have more realistic understandings of the means to being a competent professional. In the respect, I think we have done them a great service in understanding that.

The assessment results of the competency model for individuals, specific cohorts, and historic averages are available for both programs if someone is able to put in the time and effort to do glean and analyze the data. Most of the respondents interviewed believed that it could be helpful to the students, supervisors, faculty members, and program review committees.

### ***Conclusion***

The College Student Personnel program at Bowling Green State University and the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at Colorado State University both have integrated the competency model into the curriculum of their master's degree programs to assist students in the development of their skill sets and knowledge bases. The models at each university have differences, but they are almost identical in nature and purpose. All of the students, faculty members, and supervisors I interviewed appreciated the way that the competency model held students accountable to the identified competencies, while also helping students be intentional about the planning of their experiences. One supervisor told me that the competencies help legitimize the purpose of a graduate degree in the field of student affairs/higher education, while also helping advance the development of the students in graduate school. "I think that we have to prove what we are doing, the reason that we are doing it. There is a goal that we are trying to reach...and the competencies help us find how to get to those goals."

The models enable the individual student to intentionally seek out opportunities that will maximize his or her experiences and education. This allows the student to acquire the necessary

competencies in graduate school that will assist them in becoming a strong practitioner once he or she graduates. The model also creates a natural way to evaluate skill sets and knowledge bases, besides those acquired and assessed through traditional coursework. One faculty member appreciates the competency model because before it was created, “we didn’t really have a way to assess whether this student could actually do the work. They might be great in the classroom, but not necessarily out in the field.”

The competency models at both programs are designed to interact with the social environment and people around the student to support and challenge the student to grow and develop. Through formal and informal structures, students are able to develop relationships with supervisors, faculty members, advisors, and peers. All of these groups of people provide sources of challenge and support for the individual student as they work through the competency model and matriculate through the graduate program. Both CSU and BGSU have intentionally created certain formal structures that help the individual use the people within the social environment to advance their education and their development along the competency model.

Stakeholders within both programs also have access to assessment results. These assessment results could be used to help the individual student reflect, evaluate, plan, and grow. If utilized, the results could help supervisors reflect and plan for their current and future supervisees. The results could also help faculty members plan experiences, adapt the curriculum, or adapt the competency model to advance the learning of future student populations. At this time, neither of the programs is using the results to that extent described, though faculty members plan to do so.

The purpose of competency models is to assist the growth and development of the individual along an identified set of skills, knowledge, and characteristics. Both the SAHE

program at CSU and the CSP program at BGSU have implemented competency models into their curricula for the benefit of the student. Faculty members, supervisors, and students all appreciate the positive influence that the competency model has on the development of the student. One student at CSU described how the competency model forces students to reflect, which in turn makes the student a better professional, and a better person. “We as humans don’t take the time to reflect like we should. So I appreciate because it helps me reflect and draw explicit behaviors to a list of competencies. So it has helped me in my head kind of learn through reflecting and it validates what I am doing and validates my experiences. So, I think that we are lucky.” Students interviewed agreed that they are better off because of the competency model, and they went so far as to state that students at programs without competency models would be a disadvantage when entering the workplace.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter provides a summary and conclusion of my research. First, I provide a summary of the study. I discuss the five major conclusions that I derived from my research and my findings. The third section of this chapter includes the implications for programs looking to adopt or create a competency model. Fourth, I discuss some of the areas of research that could be explored. Finally, I provide an overall conclusion to my study and summarize my major conclusions.

#### ***Summary of the Study***

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the creation and utilization of competency models in higher education masters level preparation programs, to understand what outcomes and assessment measures have been identified in competency models, to discover how faculty members, graduate students, and graduate assistantship supervisor perceive the competency models and their effectiveness, to look at the experiences that programs provide for graduate students to help them develop the competencies, and to understand how assessment measures have been used to increase learning. Through case studies of two student affairs preparation programs, I provided an in-depth summary and description of why and how these programs created and implemented competency models to benefit their students.

The research questions are restated here

1. Why and how did two higher education preparation programs create a professional competency model for the graduate students in the program?
2. What are the characteristics of those competency models? What outcomes and assessment measures have been identified?
3. How have faculty members and graduate assistantship supervisors created intentional experiences that lead to the identified outcomes?

4. How have assessment results been used to improve learning?
5. How do stakeholders perceive the competency model and its effectiveness?

### ***Conclusions***

I have identified six major conclusions from my research. Those major conclusions are stated below.

- Several factors influenced the adoption of the competency model.
- The two competency models are more alike than different despite not being exactly the same.
- Increased structure and accountability are important in order for students to be successful with the model.
- Positive, influential relationships are important to the success of the student.
- Competency model results should be collected and used to advance learning, but are not used in this way as much as they should be.

I will provide a description of each of these conclusions and support the conclusion with evidence from literature and my conceptual framework.

#### ***Several factors influenced the adoption of the competency model.***

I was not able to gather much detailed information as to how decision-making processes occurred regarding the creation of the competency model. However, I was able to gather that both programs utilized existing models from professional organizations, and other graduate programs to derive master lists of competencies, and then discussed the necessary competencies that matched their program's curriculum. The professional associations and accrediting associations in the field were pushing for learning outcomes and competency-based education (CACREP, 2001; CAS, 2003; CAHEP, 2009; ACPA/NASPA, 2011). The two programs I studied wanted to remain current with competency-based initiatives in the field (Chyung, Stepich, & Cox, 2006; Voorhees, 2001; Jones & Voorhees; Kuk & Banning, 2009). Furthermore, both programs had faculty members involved in an ACPA committee that was charged with creating a competency model for practitioners in the field of student affairs. At BGSU, Dr. Leila

Moore expressed interest in creating a competency model while she was a visiting professor. Her background in professional competencies along with her involvement in ACPA assumingly had an influence on her desire to do so. At CSU, Linda Kuk, the Vice President of Student Affairs at the time, initiated the implementation of a competency model because of her work with NASPA. The portfolio piece at CSU was introduced by Dr. Kris Barnard who brought it over from another institution. For both programs, the competency models have changed over the years. External factors will continue to influence future adaptations of models at both CSU and BGSU.

Besides the external influences that influenced the creation and implementation of a competency model, both programs also cited dissatisfaction with a thesis as the final graduation requirement. Faculty and some supervisors at both programs believed there was a disconnect between the practitioner-based program in student affairs and a research-based thesis. Theses, final papers, and comprehensive exams are less effective in evaluating and proving minimal skills and competencies expected in graduates of student affairs programs, according to Burkard et al. (2005). The hope seemed to be that the competency model would produce standard outcomes for the program despite encouraging individual experiences.

In the end, I was hoping to match up the exact competency model creation with my conceptual framework and/or literature, but found that it was not possible. Interviewees at both programs could not pinpoint an exact conversation when the decision to adopt a competency model took place. Furthermore, I was not able to gather evidence as to a theoretical or intentional process for identifying and deciding on specific competencies for the respective models. The first component of learner-centered assessment by Huba and Freed (1999) is the identification of intended learning outcomes, or creation of the competency model. Though their model does not describe the process for picking the models, I also look to the work of Stark and Latucca (1997)

for this purpose. In the academic plan set forth by Stark and Latucca, the assessment process can be influenced by three forces: external factors, internal factors, and organizational factors. Society, government, disciplinary associations, the marketplace, and alumni are all possible external influences. In this case, I believe the accrediting associations, such as NASPA, ACPA, CAHEP, CAS, and CACREP all have identified and distributed a set of competencies for preparation programs or professionals in the field. This put enormous pressure on preparation programs to do the same or face claims of illegitimacy. Organizational influences can include college mission, finances, program resources, governance. I did not necessarily find much organizational factors influencing the adoption of the competency model at the case study sites, but I could assume from implied conversations that the programs were under the pressure to meet the learning outcomes of the institution as well as recruit and graduate students in order to fight for and maintain funding sources. The final force, internal influences, could include faculty backgrounds and educational beliefs, student characteristics and goals, program mission. The program mission was a strong force in determining what specific competencies are included in the model. Faculty backgrounds and expertise was also a determining factor. The work of the certain individual faculty members was the impetus for the adoption of the model at both sites.

Regardless, I can say that internal and external factors helped make the decision to adopt the competency model in both cases, but there was no formal process of doing so. I believe that the old water cooler theory probably played a part and faculty members realized that there was a consensus to do so either in a meeting or after a meeting one day.

***The two competency models are more alike than different despite not being exactly the same.***

Figure Four in Chapter Four provides a great summary of what I believe are the most important structure elements of the competency models from the two institutions. Competency

models at both programs had identified competencies, cohort components, practical experiences, reflections, evaluations, and a portfolio as a final assessment. The literature review focused specifically on the specific competencies identified and the experiences utilized to develop those competencies. In the beginning of the study, I identified a problem being a lack of consensus over competencies necessary for practitioners in the field. I knew this study would not create a consensus, but I think the study helped me understand that the slight difference in the competencies between models is okay. It is okay because the overall purpose of preparing the graduate student for a career in student affairs is the same. When comparing the two models to my analysis of the most frequently listed competencies in studies, literature, and professional associations, I found that competencies in the models match up to those competencies for the most part in Figure Three of Chapter Two, which was the large table depicting the frequency use of competencies in literature and studies. Twenty-two frequently cited competencies were listed with the citation sources. For example, I portrayed how the assessment, research, and evaluation competency was listed in 11 sources (Beatty, 1990; Burkard et al., 2005; Hyman, 1985; Ostroth, 1975; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; CACREP, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; ACPA/NASPA, 2010), while the legal issues competency was listed in nine sources Hyman, 1985; CAHEP, 2009; CACREP, 2001; CAS, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Kuk et al., 2007; Waple, 2006; ACPA/NASPA, 2010.

I compared the overall content of the competency models to Figure Three, because often the main category titles of competency areas were different. The competencies in the model adopted by BGSU are represented in Figure Three, except these three: personal foundations, student learning and development, history, philosophy and values. The competencies listed in CSU model were represented in Figure Three except for higher education systems and history,



student diverse characteristics and demographics, current issues and practices in the student affairs, managing self, and mobilizing innovation and change. The similarity between a few of these is that they are knowledge-based competencies such as history. I also make an educated guess that these are emphases in the curriculum of the respective programs, so the competencies are relevant. I do want to point out specifically that both models include a competency on personal foundations or managing self. Faculty, supervisors, and students at both programs expressed the importance of this competency and the fact that it is one that is worked on each and every day. It did not make it on Figure Three as being listed on at least six studies or literature pieces, but I believe that this is an area of growing importance and will be listed more often on future studies regarding competencies.

When I first was designing this research study, I attempted to solely look at practical-based, professional-practice competencies. I was hoping that I could only research competencies that were developed through assistantships, practica, and other practical experiences. I realized through my literature review and discussions with my advisor, that it was not possible to separate competencies out in that manner. Unlike the BGSU model, the competency model at CSU does have two different categories of competencies. There are knowledge-based and professional-practice. The knowledge-based competencies are more about knowledge sets and the professional-practice are more about skill sets. For example, Legal, Contractual, and Liability Issues is a knowledge competency, while Administrative Functions and Processes is a professional practice competency. The BGSU model has ten competency areas and does not separate them into categories like the CSU model does. While BGSU has a Law, Policy & Governance competency similar to a competency area CSU has, it does not categorize it as a knowledge competency. Respondents at both campuses told me that all competencies could be

attained in all environments. Simply stated, knowledge-based competencies were not only attained through coursework. Many respondents emphasized the importance of helping students connect all of their experiences and see the benefits of each learning opportunity (Dewey, 1986; Stuckard & Ganz, 2007). Students should value all of their learning experiences whether they are in the classroom, in their assistantships, or in their practica. Most experiences provide an opportunity to develop several different competencies, so students must be able to reflect, learn, and grow in both the classroom and in their out of classroom assistantships and experiences.

***Increased structure and accountability are important for the student in order for them to be successful with the model.***

The structure of the competency model and the accountability processes are important in setting the stage for every student at both programs to be successful. For purposes of this research, students are successful with the competency model if they meet the identified expectations of the program in regards to competency development and/or attainment. I believe that the programs also define student success as completion of the final defense of the portfolio and graduation. In conducting my research, I wanted to ask to answer the question of whether intrinsically motivated students would be successful despite the model. I found that all stakeholders believed that the amount of intrinsic motivation of the student did influence that student's success with the competency model. Active participation by the student is important, as supported by the literature of Dewey (1986) and Stuckart and Glanz (2007). Both supervisors and faculty members agreed that the intrinsically motivated students seemed to be more successful with this model. These intrinsically motivated students were more likely to seek out additional opportunities for growth, more likely to challenge themselves professionally, and more likely to meet the competency model expectations and requirements without any outside accountability measures. The graduate students who wanted to maximize their personal and

professional development would be more effective and successful with the competency model (Stuckart & Glanz, 2007). This theory rang true through my research as the competency model learning style caters to the assertive and self-initiating student. This is important for the supervisors and faculty members to consider as they work with students who need more extrinsic motivation. Experiences, accountability measures, and intentional conversations have to be built in order to maximize the success of the competency model for these students, as well.

However, I found that increased structure and accountability processes associated with the model benefited all types of students. The students at both programs appreciated how the competency model helps set uniform standards while still allowing for individual experiences and goals. The students that I interviewed liked having a document that set up guidelines for them without placing restrictive expectations on what experiences every single person had to get. Voorhees (2001) thought that competencies should “provide students with a clear map and the navigational tools needed to move expeditiously toward their goals” (p. 11).

It is important to identify the measures in place to hold the students accountable to meeting the outcomes of the competency model. Both programs utilized reflections and semester evaluations (both self-evaluations and evaluations by supervisors) in order to track the progress of the student and provide continual feedback to the student as he or she matriculates through the program. As described in chapter four, the structure of these pieces is different at each program, and at BGSU, the structure can be different for each individual student due to having different CSP 6890 course advisor. I realized that these pieces seem to be an integral part of the growth of the student as the advisors and faculty members make sure the student is making progress with the competencies. I do want to also point out that the accountability measures are stated, but there does not seem to be any teeth to them and students perceived them to be somewhat soft.

The increase of actual accountability milestones and consequences would be helpful for both programs.

The portfolio is the final assessment measure at both CSU and BGSU. This portfolio is expected to be a culmination of their experiences and a summary of all the competencies students have developed or acquired. The portfolio is a direct measure of the outcomes of the programs (Huba & Freed, 1999). As discussed earlier, both programs decided that this was the most effective measure of the skill sets and knowledge sets acquired through the program, instead of a more traditional thesis. This stressed again the importance of the second element of the conceptual framework, which involves designing or selecting the assessment measures that will identify whether the learning outcomes, or competencies, have been achieved (Huba & Freed). When developing a competency model or any learning-centered assessment model, one must spend adequate time in selecting appropriate and accurate assessment measures. Both programs cited a disconnect when using a theses as a final assessment for their program. Faculty members believe that a portfolio is a better measure of the learning outcomes, or competencies, they have identified for the respective programs. The effectiveness of the portfolio in demonstrating competencies and evaluating learning outcomes in student affairs programs is supported in the literature (Reardon et al., 2005; Herdlein, 2004).

It is also important to remember that competency-based education involves a more comprehensive curriculum design than what the SAHE and CSP programs have with their competency model. I pointed out earlier that true competency-based education must involve changes in pedagogy and assessment. Jones and Voorhees (2002) point out that “some college and universities have undergone dramatic transformations in response to this movement toward performance-based learning, while others have maintained a traditional curriculum packaged in

standard delivery formats and provided in regular academic terms” (p. 12). That is not to say that either of these two specific programs have goals of reaching true competency-based education. The point is the assessment process must be evaluated and improved in order to provide the best experience for the student so they can maximize their competency development. Both CSU and SAHE must assess the reliability and validity of their assessment measures. They are not alone in this task. Jones and Voorhees (2002) found that few early implementers of competency-based learning models have formal processes in place for assessing the reliability and validity of their competencies. It is the tendency for all faculty members to spend time improving the delivery process, when time must also be spent improving the formal assessment and accountability measures (Jones and Voorhees). Both programs have the evaluations, reflections, and portfolios. Are they working and appropriately evaluating the development of competencies? I was told by faculty members at both programs that most every student does graduate with a little support. Does that mean that every student develops all of the competencies? Both programs have a fair amount of subjectivity to their assessment measures. That subjectivity decreases the reliability and validity of the assessment process. Increasing the documented structure and objectivity to the assessment measures will assist the graduates of both programs in their future careers.

***Positive, influential relationships are important to the success of the student.***

One of the themes that I found in comparison of the programs was the concept of the social environment. Students at both institutions were intentionally and unintentionally influenced by the other individuals in the program: the faculty members, advisors, supervisors, and other students. I found that my research supported the literature (Saltmarsh, 2008; Roberts, 2003) as faculty members and supervisors both played an important role in the learning experiences of graduate students. My research could not necessarily support the opinion of

Saltmarsh (2008) that the graduate assistantship supervisor was the most influential figure for the student. This might have been true in some cases, but the students I interviewed also spoke of faculty members and other professionals serving as their primary mentor during their program.

My research also found that peer collaboration and competition played roles in the success of the individual. Students looked to more experienced peers for wisdom and advice. Structures were set up in both programs for conversations and projects that empowered students to learn from each other. I did not find anything in the literature on competencies relating to the role of peer influence; however.

Students spoke about having long conversations with advisors and supervisors about their assistantship, practica, and other learning experiences. Part of connecting experiences, is the opportunity for students to reflect on experiences (Dewey, 1986). As mentioned several times, both programs spent considerable time asking students to reflect on their learning and experiences, both in formal documents and in informal conversations. The supervisors and advisors act as facilitators for these conversations and documentation. The benefits of reflections and intentional conversations for student development and knowledge construction are documented well in the literature (Dewey, 1986; Foster & Ward, 1996; Carpenter et al., 1999; Stuckard & Ganz, 2007; Saltmarsh, 2008).

Ultimately, I found through my research at both institutions that the level of training and education on the model for students and supervisors was similar. However, students and supervisors all expressed desire for more communication and knowledge in order to better utilize the model and maximize the success of the student. Palardy and Eisele (1972) state that an important piece of competency based education is that it should be so “organized and managed that all persons concerned with or affected by the education of the learners share the

responsibility for it” (p. 547). That piece seemed to be missing at both programs, especially at BGSU. Supervisors did not seem to have much responsibility for the model, let alone enough knowledge about it. For the most part, the competency model was the responsibility of the student and their advisor. Other than the semester evaluations, most supervisors were not involved in their student’s competency model.

My research revealed that students must be able to form positive, influential relationships to assist them in their personal and professional development. They also benefit from having an integrated social environment, where all of the entities are educated on the necessary components of the competency model and are communicating effectively on the development of the student. This enables the faculty members, advisor, supervisor, and student to be on the same page with the progress of the student and his or her development along the competency model.

***Competency model results should be collected and used to advance learning.***

I discussed throughout Chapter four that both programs had not done any formal analysis or decision-making based on the data that had been collected from the competency evaluations, reflections, or portfolios. Faculty did express the desire and need to spend more time and effort to do so in order to improve the model and improve the overall development of students. On the positive side, the documentation structures were in place for the data to be gathered, summarized, and analyzed fairly quickly. This is especially so at Colorado State where an online survey tool is being used to assist in the summary and analysis of the data. Both the quantitative data and the qualitative data could prove very valuable if the programs were going to use the results to impact future decisions regarding the competency model, experiences, and curriculum. Huba and Freed (1999) believe that the assessment results and the subsequent decisions should lead to improved learning and education. The answer of why the results are not being used is not

known exactly, but I know that it takes time and effort to do it and it has not become a priority. I believe that the programs are doing themselves a disservice by not looking at the results and using them to make positive changes for the students.

Though I believe that fourth component of the conceptual framework (Huba & Freed, 1999) mostly focus on the larger cohort setting and how assessment results advance overall learning, I also applied the fourth component to the smaller scale of the individual student or the graduate assistantship site, as well. I found it interesting that few students intentionally looked at past reflections and semester evaluations as they completed subsequent documents or the final portfolio. As part of Huba and Freed's framework, as well as Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory (1986), this reflection on past experiences and use of assessment results could have helped them make connections and make future plans to further their education and development. Supervisors, save one, also did not use past documentation on the competency model results. Again, the conceptual framework would imply to us that these results could help supervisors plan experiences and intentional conversations with future graduate assistants to improve their success with the competency model. "Specific competencies provide directions for designing learning experiences and assignments that will help students gain practice in using and applying these competencies in different contexts" (Jones & Voorhees, 2002, p. 12).

### ***Implications for the Programs Creating or Adopting Competency Models***

My research created five major conclusions, which were discussed previously. These conclusions have led to five corresponding implications. These implications can be categorized in the general areas of competency selection, structure and intentionality, education and communication, supervisor and advisor relationships, and use of assessment results.

### ***Programs should not be overly concerned with the competency selection***



This study found that competency models are more alike than different. Actually, most competency models I found in studies and in literature were more similar than different. One has to wonder why there is not more consensus among the competency models when the overall purpose of the graduate programs to prepare student affairs professionals is the same (Kretovics, 2002). Based on my research at the two sites, I found that external and internal factors present during the creation and implementation of the model influenced the overall structure of the model. The programs utilized different literature, studies, comparative programs, and professional organizations to derive their competency list. The faculty members in each program helping make final decisions regarding the model also had different backgrounds, academic interests, and experiences. “Faculty are integral to the evaluation of competency-based learning as they ideally are involved in conceptualizing, defining, delivering, and assessing competencies” (Bedard Voorhees, 2001, p. 89). All of these factors had influences on the original models and the subsequent adaptations of the models. It will be important for programs looking to implement their own competency model to understand how these external and internal factors can influence the structure of the competency model. Programs looking to implement competency models will probably conduct research of the literature and other programs to find out competencies are being used. Obviously, this research will not produce an exact consensus, but it should produce enough results to get a program started. Then a program should be able to make final decisions on the specified competencies based on the curriculum, focus of the program, and discussion between faculty, supervisors, and students. There are also other competency models out there, like the ACPA/NASPA model (2010), that could be adopted so a new one does not have to be created. *Ultimately, I believe that programs mistakenly should not get caught up in completing the first step of identifying the specified competencies because steps*

*two, three, and four are more important: developing assessment measures, creating experiences leading to outcomes, and using assessment results to improve learning (Huba & Freed, 1999).*

***Structure and intentionality must be clear and uniform.***

One of the most celebrated pieces of the competency models on both campuses was the concept of the individual student. Students, faculty members, and supervisors appreciated the way that their competency model provided uniform guidelines while not restricting students from seeking out diverse experiences. Each individual student was allowed to create individual goals and seek out desired experiences, while still meeting expected outcomes. The advisors stressed intentional conversations and intentional planning, and were flexible with different means to the end. The competency models also provide general wording and competency categories, which empower students to seek out their own individual routes to their goals.

I provided a lot of information about the different types of evaluation and assessment measures for the competency model. The programs similarly used reflection documents, semester evaluations and a final portfolio. Colorado State also implemented a preliminary defense after the first year to make sure the student was progressing appropriately. Informally, the advisors and supervisors also used intentional conversations to gauge the progress of the student. These accountability steps are crucial, as the success of the students with the competency model would undoubtedly be lower if the program waited entirely until the final portfolio piece to evaluate their development in the model. I think it is also important to point out that both programs had moved to a portfolio, because of the disconnect between their practical curriculum and the thesis or comprehensive exam. *Programs that are designing a competency model have to decide how the model will be woven throughout their entire program to prevent any disconnects.* Programs also have to decrease the subjectivity to the assessment measures and

increase the reliability and validity in order to assist the students in their competency development.

***All stakeholders must be educated about the competency model and communication must be maintained.***

I found that some students and supervisors were not as knowledgeable about the competency model as they should be or wanted to be. For students to be successful with the model, it is crucial for them to be educated on it and take responsibility to be active participants in their development (Stuckart & Glanz, 2007; Palardy & Eisel, 1972). Students spoke of learning of the model through second-year peers and from advisors. There was often uneven education at the BGSU campus for students as the main source of competency model training was through the CSP 6890 small groups. Each small group of students received varying extents of training on the model.

Supervisors also had different knowledge levels about the model. The supervisors whom had been around longer had more knowledge. Both campuses did conduct supervisor meetings with program leaders. These meeting were the main way to educate supervisors about the competency model, though the meetings had other purposes as well. However, scheduling conflicts make it hard for every supervisor to be at every meeting so information is missed.

*Programs must have formalized and consistent levels of education and communication for both students and supervisors.* Supervisors must be educated properly about the model in order to work effectively with their students. They must also have open communication lines with the advisors and be made a part of the competency model process. Students must receive a consistent message about the competency model and the necessary expectations and guidelines.

The students at CSU were at a clear advantage from the students at BGSU because they all received the same information regarding the model from the Portfolio classes they attended.

***Supervisor and Advisor Relationships Both supervisors and advisors have a strong influence on the student.***

In chapter four and the conclusions, I stressed the importance of the relationships that the student establishes with his or her supervisor and with his or her advisor. Both relationships have great influence on the student's personal and professional development. Students do not pick either their advisor or supervisor entering into the program, but these individuals become important mentors and influential figures in the students' success with the competency model and the program. It is very important that there be training and development of the supervisors regarding graduate student supervision, program expectations, and competency model expectations. Having a supervisor who is not knowledgeable about the competency model or is not properly educated about the program expectations can have negative implications for the student. Furthermore, it will positively influence the success of the student if there is increased communication between supervisors and faculty advisors. This will enable both parties to discuss the student's development and increase their ability to assist the student through the relationship.

*In order to create the proper learning environment for the graduate student, the overall social environment of the student must be strengthened.*

***Assessment results must be used.***

It has been pretty clear that the programs have self-admittedly failed to analyze and utilize their formal assessment results. This has great implications for the programs. The assessment results could help inform adaptations of the model, suggest needed changes to curriculum, or even provide positive marketing to prospective students. I also stated that

individual students could use the results for their own development and supervisors could use results of their past graduate students to better develop experiences of the assistantship site. The assessment results are available, but they are simply not being used. This produces negative implications for the programs and for the students as opportunities for future learning are ignored. However, I also wanted to point out that it is important for programs to build evaluation structures that would enable easy collection and analysis of data. Online and/or electronic software can do most of the work for programs if set up prior. Huba and Freed (1999) believe that the fourth component of their assessment framework is just as important as the other three. *Programs need to invest adequate time and resources in analyzing and utilizing the competency model assessment results to advance student learning.*

### ***Future Research***

Based on my literature review and my research, I found several holes that lead me to believe that more research could be done. I will outline the three different areas of research below. First, I think that it could be helpful to know how many of the student affairs preparation programs are currently using a competency models. It is a question that has been asked of me throughout my research and one in which I do not have any answer. Furthermore, I believe that it would be helpful to know how many programs with a competency model use a portfolio versus some other final assessment measure like a thesis. If programs are looking towards the possibility of moving towards a competency model and/or adapting their curriculum, I think that it would be useful to know what percentage of other programs have done so.

Second, some of the literature differentiated between competencies for graduates and competencies for student affairs practitioners. Other studies merely spoke of necessary competencies for the field. One of the implications I described was the need to encourage

continual learning and development. I believe that more research could be done to differentiate between competencies that entry-level professionals need and competencies that individuals need for professional advancement. This would enable graduate preparation programs to focus on the competencies, skills, and knowledge sets necessary for practitioners seeking jobs straight out of graduate programs. Then practitioners could develop other necessary competencies for professional advancement later.

The third area where research is needed is overall program results. I think that it would be valuable to do a national study of graduate preparation programs using a consistent evaluation process, like the StudentVoice online platform, that Colorado State uses. Programs could be held anonymous in order to encourage participation. The data regarding students' development along identified competencies could help programs and the student affairs field better understand how students are progressing. Any direct measures of graduate level competencies through quantitative research could be very helpful. This could lead to any necessary curricula changes or experience development.

### ***Summary Statement of Major Conclusions***

This case study approach to research higher education competency models utilizing an assessment framework provided a qualitative, descriptive view of two student affairs graduate preparation programs. Competency models have answered the call to identify and assess outcomes in higher education (Chyung, Stepich, & Cox, 2006; Voorhees, 2001; Jones & Voorhees, 2002; Kuk & Banning, 2009). In 2004, Herdlein stated, "it is unclear whether graduate programs in student affairs have been satisfactory in preparing student affairs administrators in the rapidly changing environment of higher education" (p. 2). Both CSU and BGSU have implemented their competency models in recent years due to both external and

internal influences, and calls to meet the needs of the student affairs job market.

Here are the major conclusions again that I drew from my research. It is through these conclusions and my subsequent implications that I have hopefully answered my research questions.

- Several factors influenced the adoption of the competency model.
- The two competency models are more alike than different despite not being exactly the same.
- There is a difference between experiencing a competency area and developing a competency area.
- Structure and accountability are important for the student in order for them to be successful with the model.
- Positive, influential relationships are important to the success of the student.
- Competency model results should be collected and used to advance learning.

I believe that the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at Colorado State University and the College Student Personnel program at Bowling Green State University both on a whole have effectively created and implemented competency models for the betterment of students in their programs. Programs and individuals interested in competency models can learn a great deal from the experiences of the faculty members, supervisors, and students as described in my study. Furthermore, the competency models documents utilized by the programs can serve as effective guides and starting points for those programs that are implementing their own model.

Ultimately, I found that the competency model must be integrated throughout the practical experiences, curriculum, and social environment of the student in order to be successful. The model must be the core of the learning experience and all stakeholders must be educated and knowledgeable about its components and guidelines. Competencies must “become the cornerstone of the student’s professional socialization; serve as the guide for the student learning, and the integration of professional practice experiences” (Kuk & Banning, 2009, p. 497). Hopefully, the model helps set a foundation for personal and professional development that

continues throughout their professional student affairs career.



## Appendix A

### *Definitions*

*These definitions were created using common definitions and the sources within this study (Burkard et al., 2005; CACREP, 2001; CAHEP, 2009; CAS, 2003; Hyman, 1985; Jones & Voorhees, 2002).*

*Administrative/Management Skills* – demonstrates ability to effectively plan, organize, coordinate, and monitor in ways that the use of all resources is efficient; is able to manage projects and deadlines; is punctual and able to complete daily responsibilities

*Advising Skills* – is able to apply procedures to ensure academic success; has knowledge of group dynamics and can apply skills in order to promote leadership and attainment of common goals.

*Assessment, Research, & Evaluation* – can critique a sound study, is able to design, conduct, and report on a sound research study, assessment study, or program evaluation; understands both qualitative and quantitative methodology

*Budgeting and Finance* – knowledge of the various higher education funding sources, how to work within an established budget and understanding of budget processes.

*Communication Skills* – demonstrates effective communication skills, including writing, listening, and speaking to individuals and groups; understands how to develop and carry out a communication plan and creates a climate that encourages open and non-defensive communication, and how to foster a learning organization.

*Competencies* - combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task, which could be attained inside and outside the classroom; usually will specifically refer to the goals of preparation, but will also refer to actual outcomes when noted.

*Computer Skills/Technology* – demonstrates computer literacy and competence in the use of technology to improve administration, management, and leadership.

*Confliction Resolution/Mediation* – has the ability to facilitate mediation and compromise among students, campus, and/or community groups; can remain neutral in conflict while helping parties identify common goals and reach a desired resolution

*Counseling* – has knowledge and skills to practice both individual and group counseling approaches based on the developmental needs of the student; has knowledge of mental and emotional functions that might affect a student; has consultation skills to help student in personal, social, educational, and career planning needs.

*Crisis Intervention* – ability to respond appropriately to emergencies and crises to provide appropriate management of situation and follow-up care; can follow procedures and provide thorough documentation; is trustworthy and capable in dealing with high stress situations

*Ethical Behavior* – possesses a core set of values and beliefs that underlies the decision-making process and contributes to the common good; acts with integrity, fairness, and honesty.

*Human Resource Management* – can organize human resources to carry out goals of department; understands and accepts authority and responsibility; is able to delegate when appropriate; can mediate conflict among staff members and inspire a shared vision.

*Interpersonal Relations* – demonstrates ability to work well with others; can develop and maintain healthy personal and professional relationships; can interact effectively with a diverse group of individuals.

*Leadership Skills/Development* – participates in leadership development, consistently identifies and fosters potential future leaders; delegates to and trusts subordinate leaders; inspires confidence and secures group action; productive in accomplishing goals and objectives.

*Legal Issues* – has knowledge of and can apply legal and ethical issues and standards of practice related to higher education; understands the impact of historical legal precedents on the higher education field today.

*Multicultural Competence/Ability to work with a Diverse Population/Inclusivity* – demonstrates multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills; has the ability to ensure an inclusive culture and/or environment

*Organization Behavior and Development* – knowledge of basic organizational theory and the ability to describe accurately the organization one serves, including mission, history, politics, and current developments.

*Preparation Programs* – for this study purpose, it will specifically refer to master's degree graduate programs in student affairs.

*Program Develop and Evaluation* – develops clear objectives and coherent plans for programs; completes programs on schedule and within budget; assesses program after completion in order to improve future planning and implementation.

*Problem-Solving/Decision-Making* – understands the similarities and differences between decision-making and problem-solving; able to identify essential and effective steps in the decision-making process for individuals and organizations.

*Student Affairs* – refers to the field of student affairs, student personnel and/or student services in higher education.

*Supervision Skills* – is able to select, train, supervise, and evaluate staff members; can develop appropriate expectations for staff members and hold them accountable to those expectations.

*Teamwork/Collaboration* – demonstrates ability to understand and commit to group goals and/or

a common purpose.

*Time Management* – is able to complete tasks by set deadlines; is punctual to meetings and events; can plan ahead in order to accomplish responsibilities and goals.

*Vision* – has a vision based on one's philosophy of higher education; understands how mission and vision are carried out; understands how to create a shared vision statement.

## Appendix B

### *Bowling Green State University College Student Personnel Program*

<http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa/csp/page58422.html>

#### **ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners**

Full Document is available at: <http://www2.myacpa.org/professional-development/home>

**Advising and Helping:** Addresses the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to providing counseling and advising support, direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance to individuals and groups.

**Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER):** Focuses on the ability to use, design, conduct and critique qualitative and quantitative AER analyses; to manage organizations using AER processes and the results obtained from them; and to shape the political and ethical climate surrounding AER processes and uses on campus.

**Equity, Diversity & Inclusions** Includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to create learning environments that are enriched with diverse views and people. It is also designed to create an institutional ethos that accepts and celebrates differences among people, helping to free them of any misconceptions and prejudices.

**Ethical Professional Practice:** Pertains to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand and apply ethical standards to one's work. While ethics is an integral component of all the competencies, this competency area focuses specifically on the integration of ethics into all aspects of self and professional practice.

**History, Philosophy & Values:** Involves knowledge, skills and attitudes that connect the history, philosophy and values of the profession to one's current professional practice. This competency area embodies the foundations of the profession from which current and future research and practice will grow. The commitment to demonstrating this competency area ensures that our present and future practices are informed by an understanding of our history, philosophy and values.

**Human & Organizational Resources:** Includes knowledge, skills and attitudes used in the selection, supervision, motivation, and formal evaluation of staff; conflict resolution; management of the politics of organizational discourse; and the effective application of strategies and techniques associated with financial resources, facilities management, fundraising, technology use, crisis management, risk management and sustainable resources.

**Law, Policy & Governance:** Includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to policy development processes used in various contexts, the application of legal constructs, and the understanding of governance structures and their impact on one's professional practice.

**Leadership:** Addresses the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of a leader, whether it be a positional leader or a member of the staff, in both an individual capacity and within a process of

how individuals work together effectively to envision, plan, effect change in organizations, and respond to internal and external constituencies and issues.

**Personal Foundations:** Involves the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to maintain emotional, physical, social, environmental, relational, spiritual, and intellectual wellness; be self-directed and self-reflective; maintain excellence and integrity in work; be comfortable with ambiguity; be aware of one's own areas of strength and growth; have a passion for work; and remain curious.

**Student Learning & Development:** Addresses the concepts and principles of student development and learning theory. This includes the ability to apply theory to improve and inform student affairs practice, as well as understanding teaching and training theory and practice.

## Appendix C

*Colorado State University*  
*Student Affairs in Higher Education Program*  
<http://www.sahe.colostate.edu/professional-competencies>

### **Knowledge Competencies**

#### **I. Applied Foundational Knowledge**

Demonstrate an understanding of:

- A: individual, group and organizational and leadership theories and their relevance to student affairs practice.
- B: assessment and evaluation, methodology, and interpretation as it applies to student affairs practice.
- C: basic legal, contractual, and liability issues involved in college student affairs practice.
- D: cross-cultural and diversity related issues within the context of higher education.
- E: higher education systems, its history, and how student affairs roles, responsibilities and systems are infused into the larger educational picture.

#### **II. Professional Knowledge**

Demonstrate an understanding of:

- A: how student development and learning theory and research are relevant to student learning and personal development.
- B: student characteristics, demographics and attributes and how they influence students' education and development.
- C: student affairs standards of practice and professional ethical standards.
- D: current issues and practices in the student affairs profession.

### **Professional Practice Competencies**

#### **I. Administrative Functions and Processes**

Demonstrate the ability to:

- A: perform administration functions and services in selected student affairs functional areas (at least two distinct areas).
- B: develop, implement and evaluate educational and student service based programs
- C: utilize various forms of technology for data collection, analysis, communication and presentation of information.
- D: formulate goals; implement strategies for achieving goals through efficient and effective use of resources and evaluation of goal attainment.
- E: meet deadlines and produce quality results.

#### **II. Managing Self**

Demonstrate:

- A: adherence to and value for personal and professional ethical standards through ethical practice.
- B: personal and professional confidence.
- C: inquisitive, self-motivated commitment to learning and self-development.
- D: a commitment to personal and professional growth in the area of diversity and social justice.
- E: ability to work with others within a team context.

F: ability to make appropriate modifications to behavior based on self-monitoring and constructive feedback.

### **III. Communication**

Demonstrate:

A: ability to teach and model a respect for shared community values, including establishing and maintaining an inclusive community promoting civic education.

B: a willingness to engage in sustained dialogue in order to reach an understanding of the issues presented.

C: the ability to use sound, effective written and oral communication techniques and strategies within student affairs practice.

D: the ability to communicate in an inclusive manner.

### **IV. Working Relationships with Others**

Demonstrate the ability to:

A: relate effectively to a wide range of people and appreciate individual differences, with cultural sensitivity.

B: build rapport, show compassion and understanding for others, and establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships.

C: supervise and train diverse student affairs staff, students and/or professionals.

D: advise student groups and organizations.

E: apply student learning and developmental theory to student affairs practice in a specific context.

### **V. Mobilizing Innovation and Change**

Demonstrate:

A: the ability to develop creative solutions to complex problems and see opportunities where others see obstacles.

B: the ability to engage in the process of change instead of defend against it.

C: the belief that personal actions can make a difference.

D: the ability to engage in systematic inquiry, research, analysis and interpretation.

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